

PERSPECTIVES OF PRINCIPALS LEADING HIGH POVERTY HIGH SCHOOLS:
A MODEL OF SUPERVISORY SUPPORT

by

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ABSTRACT

School principals, specifically high school leaders, must account for students' post-secondary readiness. The National Policy Board for Educational Administration (2015) acknowledged that principal turnover rates in the nation are affecting academic results. With high turnover rates among principals of high poverty high schools, many school districts contemplate new methods of support (Honig, 2012). Reconsidering the principal and principal supervisor structure and design is difficult work. Accordingly, the nation's high schools need strong leaders to remain in low income schools and champion students' success.

This study was conducted to discover high school principals' needs for assistance from their district-level supervisors to accomplish achievement among economically disadvantaged secondary students. The three research questions guiding the study were: (a) What are the most prominent needs described by high school principals working in communities composed primarily of households of low socioeconomic status? (b) What do principals recommend their supervisors do to assist them in being effective leaders? (c) What are the principals' expectations for their principal supervisors? The findings described these principals' experiences throughout Texas and represented the needs, recommendations, and expectations they have for their supervisors.

By studying supervisory practices and relationships from the perspective of principals, a grounded model of supervisory effectiveness (Charmaz, 2014) was developed from the data. This transformation of the principal-supervisor structure has possibilities to benefit other central office procedures. The constructed model has a design to benefit other districts seeking to create conditions for building leadership capacity for principals in these districts' highest needs high schools.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Public school educators must respond to the ever-changing dynamics of federal and state accountability for student achievement; these external effects have added to the growing complexity of public expectations for schools and their leaders (Almy & Tooley, 2012; Ikemoto, Taliaferro, & Fenton, 2014). School district officials, specifically high school principals and their supervisors, must ensure that state and federal measures are met and that students graduate from high school with college and career readiness as mandated by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA, 2015) and by the Texas Education Agency (2015). While ESSA expectations for public schools have set the stage for campus leaders to be accountable for equity and high academic performance for all students (Gordon, 2017), the overall job of a public high school principal is more than just responding to ESSA; the job is tough.

In addition to addressing academic accountability measures, high school principals must create a school culture of trust and respect, set clear expectations for student and adult behaviors, retain high-quality staff, maintain a safe and secure environment, offer support services that help students and families, and communicate frequently to uphold high standards for ongoing professional learning (Almy & Tooley, 2012; Finnigan, 2012; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005). Needless to say, principals have much to manage to meet all of the complex needs in public schools, such as fostering a community of shared values, focused on instructional leadership and teacher support (Lavigne, Shakman, Zweig, & Greller, 2016). Additionally, principal leadership is essential in motivating teachers to increase achievement (Finnigan, 2012). In that same vein, school leaders must also continuously rally students, staff, and the community to remain solutions-focused where all stakeholders take ownership for developing student learning and relationships to create a culture of accountability and success (Corcoran et al., 2013;

Reeves, 2014). As well, high school principals experience other demands from their stakeholders while managing daily internal and external challenges regarding technical and adaptive issues (Drago-Severson, Maslin-Ostrowski, Hoffman, & Barbaro, 2014). The complexities of the work of high school principals endure (Lavigne et al., 2016); however, principals face increasingly difficult circumstances when they serve schools with large percentages of economically disadvantaged students (Gorski, 2017; Jennings & Sohn, 2014). Furthermore, school districts vary in levels of appropriate supervisor support (Daly, Liou, Tran, Cornelissen, & Park, 2014; Honig, 2012; Honig, Venkateswaran, & McNeil, 2017; Mader, 2016) for high school principals who face these dilemmas. Thus, these campus leaders undergo frustration, oftentimes do not experience success, and consequently, choose to leave the profession (Bayar, 2016; Boyce & Bowers, 2016).

Background of the Problem

Complicating the tasks of the nation's principals are the statistics for public school enrollment showing that 51% of America's public school children meet eligibility criteria for the federal free or reduced meal program (Southern Education Foundation, 2013). More concerning, in the United States (US), over 20% of children under the age of 18 live in households that exist below the poverty line, and in most southern states that percentage averages closer to 25% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016). On average, 1 in 5 U.S. children do not have basic food and shelter needs met due to lack of family income (Addy, Engelhardt, & Skinner, 2013). These numbers pose real problems for the nation's schools. Layton (2015) reported that:

Schools, already under intense pressure to deliver better test results and meet more rigorous standards, face the doubly difficult task of trying to raise the achievement of poor children so that they approach the same level as their more affluent peers (p.2).

Johnson, Kraft, and Papay (2012) noted “the failure of many urban schools to effectively and consistently serve their high-poverty students continues to be one of the most stubborn problems in U.S. schools” (p. 1). Poverty is a very real concern for our children, teachers, and leaders in public schools (Barone, 2006; Blankstein & Noguera, 2015; Gorski, 2008; Jensen, 2009; Ng & Rury, 2006, 2009; Parrett & Budge, 2012; Reeves, 2014).

Essentially, school principals who lead high schools in communities composed of high levels of economic disadvantage shoulder significant responsibility and are constantly challenged by all areas of school operations—most specifically, though, by student achievement (Diamond, 2006; Jennings & Sohn, 2014; Parrett & Budge, 2012). Educators are continuously learning about the effects of poverty and how these issues manifest themselves with academic achievement challenges (Barone, 2006; Blankstein & Noguera, 2015; Gorski, 2008). Learning about the effects of poverty on students’ lives, as well as on their social and academic classroom needs, is highly complicated and ever-changing (Barone, 2006; Gorski, 2017; Hudley, 2013; Jensen, 2009, 2013; Lareau, 2011). To further illuminate, Bomer, Dworin, May, and Semingson (2008) captured the essence of this dilemma:

Educators should have accurate, evidence-based pictures of what their students’ lives are like, what competencies and understandings they might bring to schools if schools were ready to receive them, and what social and cultural contexts have a bearing on what interactions occur in classrooms. (p. 2501)

Campus leaders who lack this knowledge do not readily possess the needed capacity to help children attain academic achievement when youth come to school with health issues, shelter concerns, stress, hunger, academic needs, and emotional needs (Blankstein & Noguera, 2015; Gorski, 2017; Jensen, 2009; Jiang, Granja, & Koball, 2017). In communities with high

percentages of economic disadvantage, students lagging behind in academic performance suffer from both physical and social stressors (Jennings & Sohn, 2014; Jensen, 2009; Parrett & Budge, 2012; Rea & Zinskie, 2015; Reeves, 2014) and receive minimal extracurricular activity opportunities (Layton, 2015). Furthermore, a survey of teachers nationally conveyed that 88% of the respondents said poverty was an obstacle to student learning (Communities in Schools, 2015). Leaders and teachers with little training or understanding about economic disadvantage, often do not know how to build these students' academic skills which leads to inadvertent disparity for these children (Blankstein & Noguera, 2015; Parrett & Budge, 2012). Educators need research-based training and a wide-ranging understanding about the effects of poverty on their students and their students' families in order to have any chance of attaining academic equity among their students (Brezicha, Bergmark, & Mitra, 2015; Gorski, 2008, 2017; Hudley, 2013; Jensen, 2009, 2013; Ng & Rury, 2009; Parrett & Budge, 2012). Consequently, many high schools serving students who are mainly from low socioeconomic families tend to be low-performing, and these high school principals struggle to enable their students to close the achievement gaps occurring between marginalized students and their higher economic peers (Gorski, 2017; Jacob, Goddard, Kim, Miller, & Goddard, 2015; Kannapel, Clements, Taylor, & Hibpshman, 2005).

Additionally, principals in school communities represented by low socioeconomic status face additional job complexity (Burkhauser, Gates, Hamilton, & Ikemoto, 2012; Gorski, 2017; Parrett & Budge, 2012). In a recent study, Bayar (2016) illustrated challenges in schools to be related to: (a) violence, (b) families' negative attitudes regarding the institution, (c) immigrant students' and families' barriers, (d) teachers' attitudes toward principals, (e) teacher unions, and (f) detrimental student behaviors. Of particular note, research has well documented an additional

complexity for these leaders: recruitment and retention of high-quality teachers (Almy, & Tooley, 2012; Booher-Jennings & DiPrete, 2009; Brezicha et al., 2015). Teacher retention is a continuing issue in low income, hard-to-staff schools (Brezicha, Ikoma, Park, & LeTendre, 2019; Hughes, Matt, & O'Reilly, 2015). Correspondingly, Almy and Tooley (2012) described research on teacher retention; "Teachers generally leave high-poverty schools at higher rates than their colleagues in lower poverty schools and that whether they stay or leave, teachers in high-poverty schools are less satisfied in their positions" (p. 3). Research from Ladd (2011) discussed the complexity as "the preferences and behaviors of teachers are also a contributing factor in that many teachers with strong credentials tend to be reluctant to teach in schools with large concentrations of disadvantaged students than in schools with more advantaged students" (p. 206).

Research has documented that staffing in low income schools is comprised of ineffective or inexperienced teachers (Hudley, 2013). These schools of economic disadvantage also experience higher teacher turnover rates and employ teachers who have out-of-field experience or alternative certification and lack secondary classroom experience (Peske & Haycock, 2006). In many cases, these ineffectual teachers and school communities do not have capacity or beliefs to help disadvantaged students and grow them academically (Freidus & Noguera, 2017; Gorski, 2017).

To add to the complexities of leadership in schools filled with marginalized students, these campuses' administrators are expected to align strategic goals, learning time, resources, and policies to focus on high expectations for student achievement (Straw, Scullard, Kukkonen, & Davis, 2013). These responsibilities become even more challenging in schools located in economically disadvantaged communities (Finnigan, 2012). Principals have to commit to the

hard work of leadership to transform their schools into communities where learning, feedback, and rewards are present to deliberately build capacity for high-quality teaching (Almy & Tooley, 2012; Finnigan, 2012; Jensen, 2009). This work takes time and effort. Parrett and Budge (2012) recommend that “leaders aggressively confront entrenched, counter-productive strategies and beliefs. They know that inaction perpetuates low achievement and undermines effective practices” (p. 70). The demands and pressure from ESSA, state regulators, district leaders’ expectations, teacher groups, and the greater community at large often cause new principals to leave within their first two years of leadership (Burkhauser et al., 2012). Furthermore, these pressures can also cause more experienced principals to burn out and leave the profession (O’Malley, Long, & King, 2015).

School administrators, specifically those leading schools with high numbers of students living in poverty, with limited support resources, face daunting challenges while navigating through public scrutiny and negative perceptions of school performance (Hall, Childs-Bowen, Cunningham-Morris, Pajardo, & Simeral, 2016). These challenges include serving and supporting youth of economic disadvantage who often lag behind academically because they enter elementary school behind their peers in literacy readiness, thus continuing the cycle of limited literacy in secondary school (Diamond, 2006; Peske & Haycock, 2006).

By investigating the weekly work averages of school principals, Lavigne et al. (2016) emphasized that in this study, “principals of regular public schools reported spending an average of 59 hours per week on the job” (p.4) with most of their time spent on internal administrative tasks. Accordingly, this research revealed, “On average, high school principals reported spending 3.3–4.7 more hours per week on the job than did primary and middle school principals” (Lavigne et al., 2016, p. 4).

The work day for a high school principal is complex, and it typically contains activities to manage the school environment with student discipline, parent and community responsiveness, supporting teachers, compliance items that need to be reported to the district, monitoring for safety and security (Shatzer, Caldarella, Hallam, & Brown, 2014). Likewise, Bambrick-Santoyo (2012) noted the complexity of the principal's position:

A principal's job is designed for distraction. Every day brings un-predictable crises and situations that feel incredibly urgent. Yet, by prioritizing what's urgent, leaders lose sight of what's important: actions that allow leaders to focus on improving student learning.

Good intentions and lofty rhetoric can't resolve this challenge. (para 4)

In sum, principals in low-income high schools are expected to adhere to the aforementioned duties, as well as provide instructional leadership (Bayar, 2016; Bolman & Gallos, 2010; Straw et al., 2013) maintain high-quality staffing (Almy & Tooley, 2012; Brezicha et al., 2015) and increase student achievement (Ballou & Springer, 2017; Barone, 2006; Kannapel et al., 2005; Reeves, 2014).

The above-mentioned challenges of urban and high-needs high schools contributes to the turnover rates of principals in this context (Boyce & Bowers, 2016; O'Malley et al., 2015). Those high school leaders who retain their positions beyond 1 or 2 years are often labeled the *superhero principals*, able to circumvent barriers, work endless hours, and improve low or average performing schools to gain academic achievement (Ikemoto et al., 2014). Thus, superhero principals of disadvantaged high schools must not only persevere to accomplish success in overall student achievement, but they must also successfully accomplish their schools' goals while ensuring teachers have the necessary supports to teach students living with myriad social stressors, complex conditions, and academic disadvantages (Jensen, 2009; Kannapel et al.,

2005; Parrett & Budge, 2012). To respond to these difficulties, campus leaders must sometimes work outside of the school's walls, and support students with wrap-around services such as after school support programs, school health and wellness programs, and summer programs in order to decrease the learning gaps for their underserved students (Gorski, 2017; Layton, 2015). However, when principals lack direct supervision and district support and feedback, their schools' risk of failure remains high (Bayar, 2016; Drago-Severson & Blum-DeStefano, 2014; Drago-Severson et al., 2014; James-Ward & Potter, 2011).

Context of the Problem

The National Policy Board for Educational Administration (2015) acknowledged that principal turnover rates in the nation are problematic to school success. With high turnover rates among principals of high school campuses composed of underprivileged students, many school districts' upper-level administrators and principal supervisors struggle with rethinking how to coach and support principals (Honig, 2012). Rethinking the principal and principal supervisor design is complex (Derrington & Sanders, 2011; Honig, 2012; Honig & Rainey, 2014). "Districts all too often approach principals instrumentally, and in doing so, lose the benefits of their acquired expertise, best ideas, and sustained commitment" (Johnson et al., 2012, p. 25). Collaborative relationships between principals and principal supervisors are in need of ongoing networks of district support (Corcoran et al., 2013; Daly, Liou, et al., 2014). Reconsidering alignment and communication with central office is another area for district consideration for improving situations for principal learning and growth (Honig, Copland, Rainey, Lorton, & Newton, 2010; Honig & Rainey, 2015; Jacob et al., 2015). This school district support would be used to create conditions for better rates of leadership and success among schools in communities comprised of households with low socioeconomic status. Because of the

complexity of the principal position, principals in schools experiencing the challenges of poverty rarely remain in their positions over time (Bayar, 2016; Burkhauser et al., 2012; O'Malley et al., 2015).

In traditional school district designs, central office staff members operate in silos and issue multiple mandates that must be met by school leaders (Honig, 2012; Honig & Rainey, 2014). School principals are often perplexed by the disconnections occurring between the expectations and competing priorities communicated by different supervisors, including central office administrators; this affects the actual process of principal supervision and appraisal (Derrington & Sanders, 2011; Honig & Rainey, 2014; Lavigne et al., 2016). Consequently, principals lack academic effectiveness when supervisor supports vary greatly or lead to contradictions in expectations and roles (Honig, 2012). More concerning, misaligned district supervision practices cause a lack of trust between campus principals and their direct supervisors who are often charged with providing the principals with effective mentoring (Daly, Liou, et al., 2014). In fact, Honig (2012) argued that systemic leadership failures between central office operations, district supervisors, and campus leaders occur mainly because relationships' structures are based on task completion and compliance as well as keeping the status quo of the district culture.

Also, as principal evaluations are tied to academic achievement data, principals regard their conversations with their supervisors as risky rather than supportive due to their fears of being perceived as unknowledgeable and incompetent (Daly, Finnigan, Jordan, Moolenaar, & Che, 2014). The principal supervision structure has not been designed as a partnership, and the historical roles between principal supervisors and principals have not always been regarded as collaborative (Corcoran et al., 2013; Daly, Finnigan, et al., 2014; Honig, 2012; Honig & Rainey,

2014; Jacob et al., 2015). With the disconnections in standards and practices between supervision, evaluation, and professional development, school district leaders and principal supervisors increase the likelihood of high turnover among the leaders of the schools with greatest need—those filled with children of economic disadvantage (Catano & Stronge 2006; Finnigan, 2012; Honig et al., 2010). A number of researchers report the presence of a causal link between school leadership and student performance (Jacob et al., 2015; Marzano et al., 2005; Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008). However, “relatively little is known” about what supervision strategies school principals believe most effectively enable them to achieve their central offices’ desired student academic outcomes (Jacob et al., 2015, p. 314). Principals need professional learning and growth aligned within the local school district’s system to support academic excellence (Daly, Liou, et al., 2014; Honig, 2012; Honig & Rainey, 2014, 2015; Marzano & Waters, 2009; Straw et al., 2013). As Honig and Rainey (2014) noted, school principals have been a “sorely neglected population in both the practice and research of professional learning” (p. 39). Jacob et al. (2015) also stated, “Rigorous evaluations of programs designed to provide professional development to help train and retain school leaders are almost nonexistent” (p. 314). Given that professional learning is not effectively evaluated and school leaders are neglected in this area, schools more often have need for effective leaders rather than unique *superhero principals* (Ikemoto et al., 2014). Moreover, given the increasing need for effective principals, the availability of qualified, trained principals to guide schools serving underprivileged students has shrunk (Burkhauser et al., 2012; Ikemoto et al., 2014).

Problem Statement

Due to the constraints and obstacles of economic disadvantage among students, district and campus leaders negotiate the challenges of poverty in their school communities (Johnson et

al., 2012; Layton, 2015; Parrett & Budge, 2012) while simultaneously recruiting, mentoring, and inspiring teachers who can show results that match the academic expectations mandated by state and federal laws (Hughes et al., 2015; Jennings & Sohn, 2014). Principals leading disadvantaged high schools toward academic success hold a highly significant responsibility, given that the lowest performing schools across the nation serve students in economic need (Kannapel et al., 2005). How high school principals exhibit instructional, organizational, and visionary leadership can help or hinder the overall success of students (Jacob et al., 2015; Kannapel et al., 2005; Marzano et al., 2005). The vision and execution of high expectations for learning among all students are crafted by schools' instructional leaders, or principals, and should permeate the relationships within and between schools and communities (Johnson et al., 2012; Kannapel et al., 2005; Marzano et al., 2005; Straw et al., 2013). However, principals leave the profession, and underachieving students of economic disadvantage suffer due to institutional instability at their respective schools (Bayar, 2016; Brezicha et al., 2019; Ikemoto et al., 2014; O'Malley et al., 2015).

Accordingly, school district leaders and principal supervisors must improve the support they offer to principals of high schools composed of mainly low socioeconomic students as part of responding effectively to the unique complexities of the principalship in these challenging settings (Catano & Stronge, 2006; Daly, Liou, et al., 2014; Finnigan, 2012; Honig, 2013b; Parrett & Budge, 2012). Otherwise, the problem of high turnover among principals of high schools containing high concentrations of students of economic disadvantage is likely to continue (Bayar, 2016; Boyce & Bowers, 2016; Burkhauser et al., 2012).

Purpose of the Study and Guiding Questions

This study was conducted to ascertain high school principals' needs for coaching and support from their district-level supervisors to attain academic achievement among economically disadvantaged secondary students. Probing this issue led to discoveries about principals' suggestions about how their supervisors can meet their needs for guidance and support. Through questionnaires, interviews, and reflective journaling, I gleaned insights into the lived experiences of the principals. The research questions guiding the study are as follows:

1. What are the most prominent needs described by high school principals working in communities composed primarily of households of low socioeconomic status?
2. What do principals recommend their supervisors do to assist them in being effective leaders?
3. What are the principals' expectations for their principal supervisors?

By studying supervisory practices and relationships between supervisor and principal from the perspective of principals, I constructed a grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014) about the coaching-related, supervisory, and instructional support tools needed by high school principals guiding their campuses toward academic achievement.

Significance of the Study

The experiences of principals leading schools serving students of economic disadvantage produced a grounded model of principal supervision and provided a paradigm of best practice supports that empower campus leaders who struggle to attain growth in academic achievement among their students. Additionally, data may yield recommendations for improving the resources and services offered to campus leaders by district administrators. With a greater understanding of each high school leader's experiences and perceptions, the emergent, constructed grounded

theory may be applied to building leadership capacity among secondary school principals. The results may be used to increase the upward trajectory of academic achievement among economically disadvantaged students. Additionally, a grounded model of principals' perceptions of the characteristics of supportive supervisory partnerships within their respective principal supervisors and with their stakeholders may yield opportunities for continuous improvement and increases in students' academic results.

The findings could also inform practitioners about the conditions in which school principals thrive when leading large numbers of economically disadvantaged youth toward college readiness and postsecondary opportunities. Furthermore, the study may influence action among district leaders working to respond strategically to the needs of the campus instructional leaders guiding student bodies within communities full of households with low socioeconomic status. Finally, principal supervisors may gain insight for supporting high school principals. Therefore, by learning specifically what supports are needed for improving instructional leadership efforts in high schools serving high numbers of economically disadvantaged students, the findings will add to the body of knowledge about the work of principal supervisors (Honig, 2012; Honig & Rainey, 2014; Honig et al., 2017; Jacob et al., 2015; Johnson & Chrispeels, 2010).

Limitations of the Study

This study examines supervisory practices and relationships between principal supervisors and campus principals from the viewpoint of high school principals serving economically disadvantaged school communities. Additionally, the study focuses on seven high school principals' recommendations for their principal supervisors to more effectively support instructional leadership in the context of educating students in disadvantaged high schools. The

researcher seeks to construct a theory regarding the supervisory actions high school principals need to be more effective leaders in raising student outcomes.

Anfara and Mertz (2014) suggested that researchers be mindful that a theory can both expose and conceal meaning and understanding which could also be a limitation as qualitative research relies on the meaning derived from the researcher's perspective or bias. By using constructivist grounded theory to make meaning in this study, "cultures come into play, whether or not the researcher is explicitly aware of them" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 334).

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) asserted that researchers must make intentional efforts to be aware of potential bias, which can potentially be a limitation in scope. As Merriam and Tisdell explained, "Because human beings are the primary instrument of data collection and analysis in qualitative research, interpretations of reality are accessed directly through their observations and interviews" (p. 243). Bias could be argued as a limitation due to the interpretations being subjective or potentially biased from the viewpoints of the participants or the researcher.

The constructivist's approach can reveal "how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences" (Merriam, 2009, p. 6). This can be insightful in making meaning of research; however, Charmaz (2014) stated, "the resulting [grounded] theory is an interpretation. The theory depends on the researcher's view; it does not and cannot stand outside of it" (p. 239). Therefore, the audience is limited in their interpretation and solely reliant on the researcher's viewpoint, which could be biased or misinterpreted from the data. When studying the statements from interviewees, the researcher must know that what is constructed is the intended meaning from the participant, not from researcher-biased labeling. Charmaz (2014) noted that researchers need to take reasonable risks; however in this, limitations may occur where potentially biased labels are assigned to

problematic issues, rather than working out the problems discovered in the context of the research.

Also, the scope of this work is limited to the principals' viewpoints of their professional support needs and lived experiences as leaders of high schools serving students living in poverty, and it does not canvass their principal supervisors' thoughts or opinions. Yet constructivists "emphasize entering into participants' liminal world of meaning and action," and the limited participants for this study are principals and their reports of the meanings and support actions as related to *their* view of their supervisors (Charmaz, 2014, p. 241).

Additionally, my personal and professional positionality may impact respondents' answers. Given that I serve in a position of influence in public education, participants could respond in ways they think are appealing to me. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), people often become concerned about what the researcher's agenda might be or how they, as respondents, might be portrayed. This potential limitation could affect results.

Lastly, there are varying opinions regarding sample size, saturation, and reliability (Marshall, Cardon, Poddar, & Fontenot, 2013; Mason, 2010). This could be considered a limitation due to the small numbers in qualitative research versus larger set quantitative data collection methods. Nevertheless, different purposes and approaches yield beneficial results.

Summary

Public school principals have exceedingly difficult positions, navigating multifaceted administrative and instructional leadership responsibilities; these complexities increase in larger high school settings and with serving high percentages of marginalized students. Principals are in need of supervisory support in order to manage the complexities of the position and the dynamics of garnering high academic achievement from students who are economically

disadvantaged. Yet, the professional actions of principal supervisors are not consistent from district to district, sometimes varying by individual or team. Thus, the supports needed are not always readily available, and when they are present, they do not always align to the principals' specific needs.

This study seeks to increase the number of effective coaching and supervisory support tools offered to principals in order to better develop effective instructional leadership in high schools with historically underserved populations. Thus, the supervisor support needs can be explored to guide these campus leaders to create conditions for their teachers and staff to have confidence in and enable underprivileged students to academically excel. By studying the lived experiences of principals leading schools serving students of economic disadvantage, a constructed theory may emerge to inform principal supervision and offer best practice support structures that empower campus leaders in their respective contextual circumstances. Additionally, data may present suggestions for improving the professional learning and leadership assistance offered to campus leaders by district supervisors.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Public school principals have increasingly complicated leadership demands (Almy & Tooley, 2012). Moreover, public high school principals' pressures are greater than their counterparts due to the sheer numbers of staff, students, and parents to manage. The leadership responsibilities for growing a culture of support and high expectations, combined with the larger nature of maintaining safety and security for high school students (Lavigne et al., 2016), proves most difficult for many high school principals as they are also charged with creating instructional leadership expectations for students and staff to meet state and federal graduation requirements, plus career and college readiness standards (Ikemoto et al., 2014;). In these scenarios, principals need district support (Rainey & Honig, 2015), especially when facing student academic barriers due to economic disadvantage (Blankstein & Noguera, 2015); however, there are limited numbers of research studies that have focused on effective principal supervision regarding this matter exclusively from the principal's discernment.

In order to gain a greater understanding of the intricacies of school improvement and campus leadership support, a review of the literature is needed to examine the complicated and ever-changing role of the school principal, the evaluation standards and evaluation practices for campus leaders, and the overall effectiveness of principal supervision by a principal supervisor. The following focal areas of research are essential to responding to the continuously developing needs of school leaders who garner student achievement within school systems.

Federal Requirements Bring High Scrutiny to Public School Leaders

ESSA regulations require states and local education agencies to report on their students' academic achievement; thus, campus leaders in public school systems must show academic gains among all groups of students (U.S. Department of Education [DOE], 2017). ESSA includes

requirements for federal expectations for academic performance for students and schools (DOE, 2017). Specifically, a few key components that ESSA requires are that schools:

- Progress toward academic “equity by upholding critical protections for America's disadvantaged and high-need students” (“ESSA Highlights,” para. 1).
- Ensure that “all students in America be taught to high academic standards that will prepare them to succeed in college and careers” (“ESSA Highlights,” para. 1).

“Equity-oriented groups that want as many students from disadvantaged groups as possible included in the accountability system, including the Alliance for Excellent Education and the Education Trust” (Gordon, 2017, p. 1). As these reports require schools to reveal academic performance data for all marginalized groups of students, the stakes grow increasingly higher for principals to produce better achievement results and graduation rates for disadvantaged youth. Meeting the demands of ESSA clearly places public school principals in an increasingly complex role as they navigate federal and state requirements while tending to the variety of expectations from their respective communities.

Economic Disadvantage and Children in Public Schools

Researchers and leaders agree, the issue of poverty in schools and communities needs to be continuously addressed (Booher-Jennings & DiPrete, 2009; Gorski & Swalwell, 2015; Gorski, 2017; Jensen, 2009; Ng & Rury, 2006; Ng & Rury, 2009). The numbers of students who live in poverty is estimated at 22% nationally (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016); however, accounting for children whose families cannot provide a minimum standard of food, clothing, and shelter, the percentage rises to 43% (Jiang et al., 2017). According to Cuthrell, Stapleton, and Ledford (2009) poverty exists in various forms:

Situational poverty is caused by specific circumstances, such as illness or loss of employment, and generally lasts for a shorter period of time. Alternatively, *generational poverty* is an ongoing cycle of poverty in which two or more generations of families experience limited resources. Furthermore, *absolute poverty* equates to a focus on sustenance and the bare essentials for living with no extra resources for social and cultural expenditures. (p. 104)

Sociologists, such as Lareau (2011), have spent decades documenting the effects of poverty on children and families. The complexities of the working poor, the disabled poor, fatherless households, and other multidimensional economic situations affect families' and children's abilities to navigate life and school (Gorski, 2017).

All the same, the conditions that low-income families face are difficult; these factors lead to hardships for economically disadvantaged children with their attendance and success in school (Blankstein & Noguera, 2015; Gorski, 2017; Parrett & Budge, 2012). Children from low income status do not have the same economic advancement opportunities as children from the middle or upper class (Cuthrell et al., 2009; Freidus & Noguera, 2017; Gorski, 2008, 2017; Jensen, 2009; Ng & Rury, 2009; O'Hare, 2009). Moreover, multiple risk factors, such as parental absence or death, family health issues, and mental illness, combined with economic marginalization, contribute in causing conditions for children to be less supported in school when compared to their middle-class peers (Gorski, 2017; Hudley, 2013; Jensen, 2009; Ladd, 2012; Parrett & Budge, 2012).

The Effects of Student Poverty on Educators and School Leaders

School responses are varied regarding the critical nature of poverty and its effects on students (Cuthrell et al., 2009; Diamond, 2006; Gorski & Swalwell, 2015). Most often, educators

will choose to seek employment in a wealthier school or district, not because of pay, but because the schools are well funded and the parents have the economic means to send their affluent students to school, well-equipped to succeed (Clotfelter, Ladd, & Vigdor, 2011; Jennings & Sohn, 2014; Johnson et al., 2012; Ladd, 2011). Low-income schools have higher percentages of inexperienced teachers, mainly including those educators who possess out-of-field or alternative certification credentials (Johnson et al., 2012; Kraft et al., 2015; Peske & Haycock, 2006). Experienced, high-quality teachers who work in high poverty schools are the exception, not the rule (Almy & Tooley, 2012; Booher-Jennings & DiPrete, 2009; Johnson et al., 2012; Peske & Haycock, 2006). Conversely, Johnson et al. (2012) revealed teachers, who work on low income schools, typically will remain if the ... “elements of the work context reveal that positive collegial relationships, principal leadership, and school culture” are consistently present (p. 26).

With research in “hard-to-staff” schools, school districts’ strategic staffing of talented teachers and principals can make a huge academic impact for disadvantaged students (Blankstein & Noguera, 2015). Unfortunately, other research has shown that strategic staffing is not commonly practiced as evidenced; Hahnel and Jackson (2012) revealed large scale inequities in teacher assignments in their study conducted in the Los Angeles Unified School District. Findings from this research showed, “A low-income student is more than twice as likely to have a low value-added ELA teacher as a higher income peer, and 66 percent more likely to have a low-value added math teacher” (p. 2). Additionally, inefficient hiring practices negatively impact student achievement where teachers are hired late in the school year, producing academic delays for student in reading and math (Papay & Kraft, 2016).

By inequitably and inefficiently assigning teachers to high poverty schools, students are taught by ineffective or unproven teachers (Blankstein & Noguera, 2015; Jennings & Sohn,

2014; Peske & Haycock, 2006; Papay & Kraft, 2016; Reeves, 2014). Also, school teams that face these high accountability stakes with limited teacher capacity often resort to *educational triage* strategies with struggling students (Booher-Jennings, 2005, 2006). Educational triage occurs in education based upon the medical philosophy where limited resources are provided for those who have the best chance to academically survive (Gillborn & Youdell, 2000). Student groups are ability grouped into three categories based upon medical triage application. In their study, Gillborn and Youdell (2000) identified this practice based upon three medical categories: (a) safe cases of students who will academically survive with some intervention, (b) suitable cases of students who require intensive treatment, (c) hopeless cases of students who will not pass state exams, even with treatment. Unfortunately, their research unveiled schools and teachers who directed resources and support to some students and basically abandoned others. Booher-Jennings (2005) documented this paradigm where teachers diverted resources to the “bubble kids,” those who were perceived as good candidates for passing the high stake state tests and to the “accountable” students, those that were measured by the assessment system and counted for the school’s rating. Diamond (2006) noted that the concept had become transformative in nature where it was explained: “The model that the Consortium on Reading Excellence has developed and successfully implemented is an “educational triage,” with well-run intensive care units for the most at-risk students, specialized care for those moderately at-risk, and excellent core instruction for capable readers” (para. 4). Conversely, later research revealed inconsistent results regarding the tactics of educational triage (Ballou & Springer, 2017).

Data also has demonstrated that inexperienced teachers revert to *instructional triage* whereby teachers used worksheets and test-taking strategies to increase state assessment results for low-performing, low-income students (Jennings & Sohn, 2014; Peske & Haycock, 2006). As

educators reduce the quality of classroom support with instructional triage, low income students continue to fall behind their affluent peers. This second-rate school environment yields bothersome academic delays for high-needs students (Hudley, 2013).

Unproductive staffing systems in school districts tend to hurt high poverty schools, as inexperienced or poor performing teachers are usually shuffled to these campuses; then these ineffectual educators generate neglectful learning environments for many historically underrepresented youth (Almy, & Tooley, 2012; Booher-Jennings & DiPrete, 2009). The implications of unintended bias and segregated staffing in economically disadvantaged schools further limits adolescents' access to meaningful learning opportunities and instruction from highly qualified, results-oriented teachers (Gorski, 2017; Parrett & Budge, 2012). In fact, Hudley (2013) quoted by Blankstein and Noguera (2015) notes, "A test-prep curriculum with outdated and limited resources, delivered by inexperienced teachers, is prevalent at many urban public schools, which makes it more likely that struggling students will find limited value in their education" (p. 138). Unfortunately, ongoing undesirable circumstances at low-performing schools can keep underprivileged high school students from closing achievement gaps, unless school leadership and teaching approaches transform to meet the multiple needs of these students (Almy & Tooley, 2012; Blankstein & Noguera, 2015; Gorski, 2017; Kannapel et al., 2005; Reeves, 2014). Conversely, to remedy this situation, Almy and Tooley (2012) reviewed the U.S. Department of Education's 2008 Schools and Staffing Survey data and recommended focusing on school culture and leadership for generating retention among effective teachers:

More than any other school factor, satisfaction with school leadership impacts teachers' overall satisfaction with teaching, as well as decisions about whether to stay or leave the profession. School leaders have the power to develop a unifying commitment to student

learning, set clear expectations for student achievement, and create a culture of trust and respect, all of which are important to establishing a positive school culture. Studies of high-performing, high-poverty schools that serve large concentrations of students of color show that school leaders who create a shared mission, focus on student achievement, and uphold a commitment to teacher learning can grow, attract, and retain effective teachers. (p. 3)

Schools with greater teacher capacity and cohesiveness of staff show higher academic achievement (Burkhauser et al., 2012). Helpful, collaborative, and effective principals are highly needed for retaining strong teachers in high poverty schools (Peske & Haycock, 2006; Schmid, 2018). Moreover, to retain and attract high-quality teachers in poor schools requires transforming schools into learning organizations where teachers can advance, frequently collaborate, and be rewarded for great work (Almy & Tooley, 2012; Reeves, 2014; Schmid, 2018). School culture and leadership matter in valuing and fostering growth in teachers; this professional practice retains effective teachers in schools of high poverty; good teachers leave due to poor leadership, not because of poor kids (Parrett & Budge, 2012; Peske & Haycock, 2006).

Moolenaar, Daly, and Slegers (2010) called for ongoing training to ensure teacher quality in economically disadvantaged schools to create classroom instructional capacity and improved academic performance. Specifically, educators must understand equity literacy as identified by Gorski (2017):

The issue before us, as we attempt to create more effective learning environments for economically marginalized students, is not culture, but *equity*. We can learn everything possible about this or that culture, but doing so will not help us spot subtle bias in learning materials or see injustice at play when schools eliminate arts or music programs,

or understand the connection between the scarcity of living wage work and gaps in parent engagement. (p. 18)

By developing those greater understandings of the inequities that low-income students face, educators can approach teaching and learning through an equity perspective to eliminate or reduce stereotypes and bias (Gorski, 2017).

Good schools need good teachers and leaders; high poverty schools require the best teachers and leaders to circumvent bias, improve academic performance and build strong learning communities with students' data, needs, and progress measures at the forefront of each conversation (Almy & Tooley, 2012; Gorski, 2017; Jensen, 2009; Parrett & Budge, 2012). In some situations, school leaders have responded to high stakes testing by redirecting testing preparation to students who have a good chance of meeting state standards; they are referred to as the "bubble students" and this educational triage strategy abandons those struggling students who need support the most (Jennings & Sohn, 2014). In contrast, high performing, high poverty schools devote frequent time to teacher collaboration where student data and standards are understood and proficiency is agreed upon collaboratively, not in subjective isolation (Barone, 2006; Jensen, 2009, 2013; Kannapel et al., 2005; Reeves, 2014). Recent research from Schmid (2018) found that "effective teachers (a) believe that their students can and will learn and that this learning is a reflection on the teachers, (b) engage in professional learning, and (c) apply appropriate instruction" (p. 7). For campus leaders, highly effective and quality teachers are essential to student success.

While collaboration is critical for teacher development, leadership is paramount where the principal creates the organizational and instructional conditions for academic success to be realized (Marzano et al., 2005). Effective instructional leadership matters most in poor schools

where teachers are strategically assigned and reassigned as for maximum academic impact and as their training aligns with students' needs (Almy & Tooley, 2012; Kannapel et al., 2005; Reeves, 2014). Leaders must sustain a school-wide focus for consistency in academic expectations (Kennedy, 2010; Kraft et al., 2015; Marzano et al., 2005).

The Effects of Poverty on Student Learning

Poor children often lag behind in upper grades because they enter school behind in literacy readiness (Barone, 2006; Peske & Haycock, 2006). There is not one patent solution for increasing achievement for students of poverty (Blankstein & Noguera, 2015; Gorski, 2017; Jensen, 2009; Reeves, 2014). Structure, relationships, and “affect” should be examined by school and district leaders in light of their positive properties for reducing stress reactions in poor children (Jensen, 2009).

Daly and Finnigan (2010) emphasized that “organizational change efforts are often socially constructed. Therefore, examining the underlying social networks may provide insight into structures that support or constrain efforts at change” (p. 111). This research has impact as district and schools examine the direction, speed, and depth of organizational change for schools to undergo in responding to the varied educational and social needs of economically disadvantaged students. Moolenaar et al. (2010) noted that social relationships offer valuable insights in the social and/or relational dynamics in schools, giving a lens to leaders to learn what aspects may support or constrain reform efforts to improve learning conditions for the poor.

Quality teaching is the critical high-yield factor for increasing academic success for underprivileged youth (Haycock, 2001; Jensen, 2009; Kannapel et al., 2005; Peske & Haycock, 2006). Good teaching strategies and classroom structure matter to all students, but they are highly critical for economically disadvantaged students (Hudley, 2013; Jensen, 2009; Parrett &

Budge, 2012). Clear expectations and cross curricular collaboration promote greater achievement and improved learning outcomes for poor students and better classroom conditions for achievement in the core classes as well as electives (Barone, 2006; Reeves, 2014). Teachers' content knowledge, academic skill, and literacy levels impact student achievement at high levels (Kannapel et al., 2005; Peske & Haycock, 2006). When teachers provide frequent feedback that is time-sensitive, specific, and exact, students respond with improved academic outcomes (Marzano et al., 2005).

Conversely, in many schools the staff focus on high-stakes testing triage strategies, the federal and state systems of accountability has led to emphasis on the “bubble” students, those who have a likelihood to meet standards (Diamond, 2006; Jennings & Sohn, 2014). As a result, the most marginalized and fragile learners are discarded as never being able to meet standards, thus teachers divert much-needed academic attention to the students who can pass the high stakes test. This unintended, yet vicious cycle of inequalities in staffing and classroom support, coupled with inexperienced, low-performing teachers, creates educational have-nots who increasingly get further behind their middle-of-the-road peers (Gorski & Swalwell, 2015; Hahnel & Jackson, 2012; Jennings & Sohn, 2014).

Promising Practices for Combating Poverty in Schools

Poverty is a challenging factor, but it is not a sole factor in determining student success (Blankstein & Noguera, 2015; Gorski, 2017; Haycock, 2001; Jensen, 2009, 2013; Kannapel et al., 2005; Parrett & Budge, 2012). To combat poverty and its effects on public schools and the students they serve, educators' misperceptions must be acknowledged, and current realities must be recognized (Gorski, 2008, 2017). Misperceptions about students who live in low-income or

poor conditions must be overcome by truly understanding the context in which schools and families combat this circumstance.

Payne (2003, 2005) discussed poverty and its impact on students, families, and schools. Payne's work has been widely disputed by lead researchers (e.g., Bomer et al., 2008; Gorski, 2008; Ng & Rury, 2009; Thomas, 2012) because of Payne's claims about the belief systems of parents and caregivers raise children in poverty. When educators rely on Payne's research, they fall into a bias trap in which they give greater credence to middle class assumptions about reality that may differ from the realities and assumptions had by families living in poverty (Thomas, 2012). Additionally, Ng and Rury (2009) argued that Ruby Payne misled educators by describing poverty as the only cause of students' low performance.

Bomer et al. (2008) referenced ethnographic studies when refuting Payne's (2005) generalization of the poor. Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines (1988) performed an extensive study and concluded that poverty generalizations were difficult to make when each family has unique circumstances. Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines documented the similarities among poor people's beliefs in themselves, desires to improve their children's literacy abilities, concerns for their children's welfare, approaches to foster independence in their children, and efforts to keep their kids healthy. Thus, the oversimplified representation of low-income families and students having different values from the middle class is inaccurate.

Additionally, Thomas (2012) rebuked Payne's (2005) overly broad description of the poor, found fault with Payne's work, and emphasized that students are not deficient just because they do not fit into unspoken rules of middle class. Rather, Thomas contended low income students are children who possess gifts and talents, regardless of their economic status. In sum, poverty is not the only, single cause of academic struggle (Gorski, 2008). Therefore, for

promising practices to evolve in economically disadvantaged school communities, the misperceptions and stereotypes associated with teaching student of poverty must diminish (Thomas, 2012). Some noteworthy recommendations and practices that have promise are reviewed in the following paragraphs.

In his study, Reeves (2014) analyzed schools and labeled the specifically successful school as a *90/90/90 school*. For reference, a 90/90/90 school is one in which 90% of students are high-poverty, 90% of students are minority, and 90% of students meet or exceed state testing standards. In this type of school, staff place a high emphasis on and showed high results with student academic achievement.

In his research, Reeves (2014) organized the common practices shared by 90/90/90 schools. One key factor Reeves recognized as occurring consistently among the 90/90/90 schools involved the educators' targeted focus on student achievement. Teams in these schools operated with a growth mindset to focus on student improvement and opportunity rather than on failure and recovery. Reeves found the successful 90/90/90 schools focused on the following: (a) core curriculum in math, reading, and writing; (b) frequent assessments with multiple chances for improvement; (c) continuous non-fiction writing; and (d) collaborative scoring of student work. The faculty and leadership prioritized a few academic areas for improvement and did not focus on multiple goals. Teachers and leaders invested time for students to write to learn in all subjects. Furthermore, responsibility for the accountability scores for students were shared throughout the school and the school system on many levels (Reeves, 2014), and these overall tenets provided the structures and systems for student success.

Jensen (2009) conducted a review of multiple studies to discover promising practices described in seven studies on high performing and high poverty schools. The results led to the Jensen presenting the “Five SHARE Factors” that resonate consistently in the literature:

1. Support of the whole child
2. Hard data
3. Accountability
4. Relationship-Building
5. Enrichment mind-set (pp. 66-68).

These combined school-wide efforts were noted in various schools across the nation. First, in supporting the whole child, Jensen (2009) noted that low-income students’ health, shelter, and food security were services supported through the school-community connections and designed to create better learning conditions. Second, successful schools used hard data to analyze situations for improvement with corresponding plans for improvement. Third, there was a high level of accountability witnessed among the staff and students in the high-performing schools, and Jensen (2009) acknowledged that educators only have an estimated 28% of students’ waking hours to make a significant academic difference in their lives. Accountability, for these learning organizations, meant every minute in the school counted toward improving outcomes for economically disadvantaged students.

With the final two factors, school teachers and leaders took intentional actions for thoughtful interactions between people in the schools. Fourth, in relationship-building, teachers intentionally designed opportunities for students to build relationships with each other and with the teachers themselves. With teachers, school leaders created conditions for collaborations, celebrations, and time for teachers to form community and connection with each other. Fifth,

with enrichment mind-set, teachers in these schools were engaging where they challenged students to excel, while providing both enrichment and support, rather than punishment and remediation. The premise was that personal outlook matters when the adults adhere to growing students instead of trying to repair them (Jensen, 2009). In conclusion, these SHARE factors were significant as noted by the multitude of schools reviewed and the literature supporting these practices.

In a comprehensive study of high-performing/high-poverty (HP/HP) schools, Parrett and Budge (2012) concluded that both collaborative and distributed leadership played a highly significant role in the successes of HP/HP schools. Successful HP/HP leaders established conditions for all of their students to academically achieve at high levels; continually built leadership capacity across their school communities through student, professional, and system learning designs; and fostered learning environments in which students experienced safety, health, and compassion. Parrett and Budge identified successful school cultures involving teachers who show their commitment to high expectations and equity, remain accountable and courageous to promote school improvement, and are vested in students as advocates for their academic and social gains. Finally, Parrett and Budge noted the influences of internal and external factors from the classroom, school, district, community, and family; within each context, poverty must be considered to shift mindset and “approach where it is not about fixing students; rather it is about transforming schools so they better serve students who live in poverty-students who are worthy of excellent schools as are their middle-class peers” (p. 117). The HP/HP schools’ leaders and teachers in this study were changing the lives of the students they served (Parrett & Budge, 2012).

A lack of equity and access have been touted as potential barriers to academic achievement for students who experience poverty (Gorski, 2017). Noguera, Darling-Hammond, and Friedlaender (2015) argued against demography as:

Destiny, or that children from low-income communities cannot be expected to achieve. However, it does mean that we must pay attention to the ways in which poverty negatively influences academic outcomes, and we must ensure that our schools provide the academic and social supports that enable students to thrive. (p. 3)

The literature suggested that responding to these obstacles benefits students from low-income families. According to Blankstein and Noguera (2015) in the 21st century system, public schools' promising practices must be:

- *Extended* where supports are available for disadvantaged youth from their infancy to post-graduation, and where services are accessible to support them for achievement;
- *Expanded* to replicate enrichment opportunities that are experienced by students of higher income and to offer increased time throughout the year where students are continually learning and keeping up with their more affluent peers;
- *Differentiated* where education is varied and appropriate for each student's unique learning needs, rather than a whole class approach to instructional delivery.

(p. 198)

Finally, Noguera et al. (2015) summarized the concerns faced by students in poverty by arguing the following:

To ensure equity in access to deeper learning, practices and policies must address the context for education both outside and inside of schools. To enable low-income students

to learn deeply and successfully, schools that serve them must offer a high-quality instructional experience and the wraparound services that can help ameliorate the stressful conditions they experience in their communities. (p. 2)

Through these methods, historically underrepresented youth can flourish academically and graduate to post-secondary college or career opportunities (Gorski, 2017; Noguera et al., 2015). As more research is collected, transforming practices with greater understandings of the needs of low-income students may yield better academic results for students who are in communities with high percentages of economic disadvantaged households. The following section provides recommended standards from the available literature for improving and aligning standards and expectations to enable principals to gain effective supervision and to maximize their leadership successes in their schools.

Principal Standards to Provide a Roadmap for Performance and Evaluation

Principals are challenged to sustain academic standards for all students, and this becomes increasingly complex with leading economically disadvantaged schools filled with students who have high needs (Finnigan, 2012). To better realize the role of the campus leader in supporting the high poverty learning institution, it is essential to understand the professional standards of the role itself. Through national standards, educational leadership criteria have been designed to better define the responsibilities and expectations of school principals.

Nationally, common language and a model for principal standards for educational leadership have been created. As the National Policy Board for Educational Administration (2015) reported, the new standards were developed to respond to the ever-changing complexities of the job of the school administrator. These new standards are called the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL), previously known as the Interstate School Leaders Licensure

Consortium (ISLLC). The National Policy Board for Educational Administration's (2015) revised PSEL document:

Reflect[s] the leadership work that research and practice suggest are integral to student success: 1) Mission, Vision, and Core Values; 2) Ethics and Professional Norms; 3) Equity and Cultural Responsiveness; 4) Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment; 5) Community of Care and Support for Students; 6) Professional Capacity of School Personnel; 7) Professional Community for Teachers and Staff; 8) Meaningful Engagement of Families and Community; 9) Operations and Management; and, 10) School Improvement. (p. 3)

The transitions to the new PSEL were developed in accordance with multiple national educational leadership organizations as well as with input from school district educators. These standards provide context and guidance for school leaders to respond to the increased complexity of the school principal's leadership position. According to Murphy, Louis, and Smylie (2017), the new principal:

Standards offer more detailed guidance related to leadership for curriculum, instruction, and assessment; they give more attention to the need for school leaders to create a community of care and support for students; they more fully describe school leaders' responsibility to develop the professional capacity of teachers and staff, and they stress the value of engaging families and community members in student learning. (p. 22)

Complexities are numerous as noted in the standards; although one area is not specifically mentioned, such as leading schools of disadvantage; nevertheless, the standards do intentionally state that support will be in place for *each student*. Thus, this will add to the multi-faceted nature of the leadership work of the school principal. The over-arching direction for campus

administrators, when navigating the challenges of educating low-income students, are noted in the general professional standards and categories however, the intensity of the leadership required for mitigating the effects of poverty and advancing academic achievement for marginalized students creates additional intricacies for leaders in this context (Almy & Tooley, 2012; Bayar, 2016; Ladd, 2012).

Principal standards are also supported by research as they define expectations and clearly guide the work of leaders (Derrington & Sanders, 2011; Murphy et al., 2017). Lastly, standards can influence leadership practice and can lead to school principals' growth and satisfactory or better evaluations (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015). Nationally, the PSEL are not the only principal standards that exist. Texas also has a statewide set of standards, which are explained in the following section.

Currently in Texas, campus leaders are evaluated with the Texas Principal Evaluation and Support System (T-PESS; Texas Education Agency, 2018). The balanced leadership framework by Marzano et al. (2005) served as the focal point on the standards developed for this state-specific set of five standards. The system of T-PESS standards encompass the mindset that leadership is both perceiving what to do and knowing why, how, and when, how to do the tasks of leadership (Marzano et al., 2005; Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2003). The Texas framework describes the competencies, skills, approaches, resources, and training that educational leaders need to advance student achievement (Texas Education Agency, 2018). In T-PESS, there are five identified standards for the campus leader: (a) instructional leadership, (b) human capital, (c) executive leadership, (d) school culture; and (e) strategic operations (Texas Education Agency, 2018).

School districts have begun to implement processes to enable principal supervisors to collaborate with school administrators based on the available standards. Aguilar and Edwards (2014) contended that institutional congruence, a manner in which school districts organize for coherence, is necessary for reform efforts where change is adopted at the central office leadership level to impact principal and school performance. Honig (2013b) argued the following:

The experience of pioneering districts, suggests that transformation should involve creating intensive partnerships between executive-level central office staff, developing and aligning performance-oriented central office services to support district-wide instructional improvement, and establishing superintendent and other central office leadership that will help staff continuously build their capacity for better performance.

(p. 1)

Creating aligned, standards-based expectations and appraisal systems while producing collaborative coaching conditions for principals to experience, may enable school districts to retain good principals rather than losing them due to frustration, specifically in the context of leading high poverty schools (James-Ward & Potter, 2011; Ikemoto et al., 2014; O'Malley et al., 2015). Principal supervisors can provide their principals with an understanding about the art of utilizing learning tools for gaining capacity to lead and learn continuously (Honig & Rainey, 2014).

Principal Supervisor and Supervision of Principals at Schools of Economic Disadvantage

Research has begun to uncover the effects of principal supervision on principals and academic achievement (Honig et al., 2017; Jacob et al., 2015). Leadership development, not the effects of principal supervision, has mainly been approached in the literature through suggested

frameworks or suggested roles and responsibilities (Aguilar & Edwards, 2014; Derrington & Sanders, 2011; Hall et al., 2016; Williamson & Blackburn, 2016). Furthermore, the principal supervision structure was not originally designed as a partnership with principals (Corcoran et al., 2013; Daly, Finnigan, et al., 2014; Jacob et al., 2015; Honig & Rainey, 2014).

The role of principal supervisor traditionally has been to monitor the results and work of the campus principal without being involved the actual work itself (Honig, 2012; Honig et al., 2017). Additionally, past methods for managing principals have included the supervisors conducting class observations and feedback reports to principals as well as watching over the compliance aspects of campus operations (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2015; Honig, 2012; Honig & Rainey, 2014). Leadership practices must be redesigned so principal supervisors can transition away from compliance and monitoring activities, to truly engaging in a professional partnership built on trust and leadership growth for the school principal (Barnes, Bullard, & Kohler-Evans, 2017; Hall et al., 2016). Recent researchers showed that principal supervisors do engage in professional development and coaching with their principals (Daly, Liou, et al., 2014; Honig et al., 2017), which demonstrates that there are multiple ways in which principal supervisors support campus administrators.

Through the process of principal supervision and evaluation, studies have shown there is conflicting communication from principal supervisors in what they expect (Derrington & Sanders, 2011; Fuller & Hollingsworth, 2013; Honig, 2012; Jacob et al., 2015). Additionally, reporting structures and principal supervisor assignments vary from district to district (Honig & Rainey, 2014). Too often, campus principals are unclear about the performance expectations for instructional leadership, and the lack of clarity causes confusion (O'Malley et al., 2015). Opening the lines of communication, having open dialogue regarding best practices for teacher

observations and feedback, operating professional learning communities, supporting academic standards, and studying performance data enable the principal to gain deeper understanding of how the school can meet standards (Vander Ark & Ryerse, 2017). Communication provides a bridge in the political landscape and enables the work of the principal supervisor to ensure the sustainability of the redefined model of the central office supervisors supporting campus principals (Honig, 2012; Singh, 2013). Also, principal supervisors' maintenance of their relationships and communication of expectations with principals enable stronger working relationships and social engagement (Corcoran et al., 2013; Honig, 2012) that can allow leaders to wrestle together with ideas and make changes.

For effective leadership results, principal supervisors must mindfully model teaching behaviors to build capacity in the principals they mentor (Honig & Rainey, 2014; Honig et al., 2017). By aligning their guiding and coaching practices with campus leaders' needs, principal supervisors can partner with campus leaders to garner greater student achievement. Vander Ark and Ryerse (2017) recommended for "more students to experience powerful learning, we need to create development pathways that allow school and district leaders to benefit from the same blended, competency-based and deeper learning experiences that they seek to create for students" (p. 3).

Additionally, reporting structures and principal supervisor assignments vary from district to district (Corcoran et al., 2013; Honig & Rainey, 2014). In many districts, principal supervisors have large caseloads of principals to manage with focus being on managing rather than mentoring (Barnes et al., 2017; Corcoran et al., 2013). According to the Council of Chief School State Officers (2015):

That job description [one of compliance] is under review. Recent research suggests that principal supervisors can positively affect student results by helping principals grow as instructional leaders. With the right training and support, they can assess and evaluate principals' current leadership practices and identify professional learning opportunities most likely to lead to improvements in the quality of teaching, learning and achievement. Moreover, they can ensure that the principals' work and vision aligns with district goals, and that the central office effectively supports school leaders, schools and student success. (p. 8)

Through a longitudinal study, supported by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the University of Washington's Center for Educational Leadership, Honig and Rainey (2015) have shown that research-based strategies are currently informing the work of principal supervisors and creating new ways of supporting campus leaders. Those strategies are being utilized as follows:

- 1) Define the principal supervisors' role as focused on principal growth and learning.
- 2) Define the principal's role as focused on instructional leadership.
- 3) Principal supervisors report to, or near, the superintendent.
- 4) Principal supervisors work with a manageable caseload of principals.
- 5) Principal supervisors oversee a subset of strategically grouped principals.
- 6) Ensure principal supervisors view their job as teaching principals to be instructional leaders.
- 7) Provide principal supervisors with professional development focused on improving their capacity to help principals grow as instructional leaders.
- 8) Proactively protect principal supervisors' time.

Redesigning principal supervision to support principals' growth as instructional leaders is possible in diverse types of school systems, but such work takes time, communication and people with the right orientation to the work. (pp. 4-5)

The Effective Principal as a Function of Support and Supervision

Principals, as school instructional leaders, have an impact on student success (Louis, Dretzke, & Wahlstrom, 2010; Marzano et al., 2005). However, while the focus on student success is critical, there are also multiple responsibilities required of school leaders (Lavigne et al., 2016). According to Marzano et al. (2005), achieving school success is directly connected to campus principals engaging students and teachers in the pursuit of academic achievement. Furthermore, effective principals align strategic goals, learning time, resources, and policies to focus on high expectations for student achievement (Straw et al., 2013). Additionally, Jensen (2013) postulated four areas in which principals increase teacher and stakeholder engagement that include developing teacher leaders, empowering teacher engagement with differentiation, knowing staff and students, and setting up conditions in the school for breaking down student barriers to learning. Furthermore, campus leaders must continuously encourage students, staff, and community members to remain solution-focused so that all stakeholders can take ownership of student learning and relationships (Corcoran et al., 2013). According to Lavigne et al. (2016) some studies have been conducted on the stress associated with principals' time and job responsibilities such as the Institute for Educational Leadership Study in 2000; however, their study demonstrated that principals work over 40 hours weekly, balancing a diverse and numerous number of tasks, predominantly tasks of an internal administrative nature. Effectiveness of the principal position is paramount to students' success and principal support is needed as evidenced by the literature.

With the position of the principal being a powerful force for student achievement, retaining effective school principals matters because principals of schools with children of economic disadvantage do not remain in their positions over time (O'Malley et al., 2015). Principal turnover affects teacher and student performance (Fuller, Young, & Orr, 2007; Jacob et al., 2015). However, principal turnover is a mounting issue in public schools, particularly those schools that serve marginalized students (DeAngelis & White, 2011). Turnover is understandable given the principal position requires an extraordinary amount of time multi-tasking and responding to the varying issues that confront them daily (O'Malley et al., 2015). School leaders who survive in their positions of leadership are often able to circumvent barriers, work endless hours, and improve low or average performing schools to gain academic achievement (Ikemoto et al., 2014). According to the National Policy Board for Educational Administration (2015):

The high turnover rate of educational leaders nationwide points to the complexities, responsibilities, and relentless pressures of the job, and such turnover derails improvement efforts necessary for student learning. Whether they are first-year novices or veterans of the profession, educational leaders need ongoing support to succeed in a job that is dramatically changing. (p. 6)

Given the impact of turnover, principal retention strategies are needed with their district supervisors to mentor them and to align their work to accomplish academic success for students (Boyce & Bowers, 2016). Principals and school climate are interwoven where teacher support and creativity for success may either be enhanced or constrained depending upon leadership behaviors (Moolenaar et al., 2010). Principal supervisors can either support campus goal attainment and leadership development or they can hinder leaders' abilities to advance student achievement (Corcoran et al., 2013; Honig, 2013a). With the disconnections between

supervision, evaluation, and professional development standards and practices, school districts are likely to have higher turnover of campus leaders in their schools that serve marginalized students (Finnigan, 2012).

The complexities surrounding high stakes accountability for student achievement and the multiple managerial demands placed on the school principal may influence superintendents and school officials to rethink past approaches to supporting schools and campus leaders (Jacob et al., 2015; Knapp, Copland, Honig, Plecki, & Portin, 2010). In past designs, central office staff members have operated in silos, projecting multiple mandates on school leaders; with competing priorities from different supervisors, school principals are often perplexed and unsure of what skills they need to lead effectively (Honig, 2013b). Lack of trust and few collaborative relationships between principals and principal supervisors has produced less than adequate mentoring effectiveness (Daly, Liou, et al., 2014). Thus, mentoring principals for success can be complex; unearthing the challenges from the principals' perspectives will contribute to a greater understanding of the tools needed for mentoring effectively to garner student success.

Honig and Rainey (2014) argued that supervisory leadership has failed between central office supervisors, and campus leaders, mainly because the structure of the relationships has been based upon addressing tasks and compliance, as well as keeping the status quo. Despite a causal link between school leadership and student performance (Louis et al., 2010; Marzano et al., 2005; Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008), there is more to be learned regarding the effects of supervisory practices with principal leadership and student achievement (Jacob et al., 2015; Waters et al., 2003). Additionally, Honig and Rainey (2014) noted that school principals have been a "sorely neglected population in both the practice and research of professional learning" (p. 39). Jacob et al. (2015) added concern about the lack of professional development

opportunities provided to principals for enabling them to demonstrate satisfactory performance and remain in place over time. Derrington and Sanders (2011) also found a disconnection between the expectations that are communicated to principals by central office administrators and the actual process of principal supervision, professional growth, and appraisal. Lavigne et al. (2016) suggested that with less than half of principals reported professional development experiences with leadership coaching, and that more studies are needed to learn how principals decide on their professional development and what effects principal professional learning has on staff and students. All in all, professional growth for principals is needed to serve the variety of needs they have in their leadership roles.

The application of evaluation tools often varies from one district to another, and principals and superintendents frequently hold different perspectives about the purpose and usefulness of the principal evaluation and appraisal process (Clifford, Hansen, & Wraight, 2014). The overall leadership evaluation in most districts is not aligned within the local system to support each school leader's pursuit of academic excellence (Honig et al., 2010; Marzano & Waters, 2009; Straw et al., 2013). According to Catano and Stronge (2006), a lack of evaluation clarity combined with the complexity of the campus leadership job, makes the task of principal evaluation a challenge. As principal evaluations are tied to data, principals regard their conversations with supervisors as risky rather than supportive due to fears about being perceived as unknowledgeable and incompetent (Daly, Finnigan, et al., 2014).

The principal supervision structure has not been designed as a partnership, and the historical roles between the principal supervisor and the principal have not always been collaborative (Corcoran et al., 2013; Daly, Finnigan, et al., 2014; Jacob et al., 2015). This structure leaves campus leaders unsure of what direction they need to take in various situations

and hesitant to seek professional advice (Daly, Finnigan, et al., 2014). The central office focus has been about compliance monitoring, but a focus on principal capacity building could improve the evaluations principals of schools with high percentages of economically disadvantaged students receive, thereby affecting turnover rates (Honig & Rainey, 2014; Ikemoto et al., 2014; O'Malley et al., 2015). Further study is needed in this area to determine principals' needs in the area of supervision, professional growth, leadership development (Honig, 2012; Honig & Rainey, 2014; Honig & Rainey, 2015; Jacob et al., 2015).

Summary

The methods of principal evaluation and the role of the principal supervisor must change and respond to the multifaceted internal and external forces that school leaders face constantly (Derrington & Sanders, 2011; Honig, 2012; James-Ward & Potter, 2011; Marzano & Waters, 2009; O'Malley et al., 2015). With the embedded support for leadership provided by the principal supervisor, the principal experiences growth from the coaching, and consequently an increased sense of self-efficacy (Jacob et al., 2015; Waters et al., 2003). According to Wahlstrom and Louis (2008), self-efficacy gives meaning to ongoing teaching and learning at the campus as principals benefit from shared partnerships in which the teachers and principal work collaboratively to improve instructional behaviors. Barnes et al. (2017) concluded that principals attribute leadership improvement to the refinement of practices when they know “not only *how* to improve an existing routine, or *how* to put a previously encountered idea into practice, but they had also learned *in and from* actually doing something new” (p. 271). As the principal supervisor engages in the buffering of barriers (Corcoran et al., 2013), the high-poverty school's leader is protected from entanglement in constraints such as construction projects, setting up vendors for purchasing resources, and others. Consequently, principals in schools serving

students with economic disadvantage can be dedicated to the work of teacher observation and feedback, instructional leadership, and improving culture. Thus, principals gain the self-efficacy that is essential to success as they can positively impact their mental models of what is reality and what current situations can become (Ikemoto et al., 2014; Singh, 2013).

CHAPTER 3: DESIGN OF THE STUDY

Introduction

This chapter describes the methodology for investigating high school principals' perceptions of the supports provided to them by their supervisors. This qualitative study used constructivist grounded theory as a method of research to better understand the coaching-related, supervisory, and instructional support tools needed by high school principals serving schools with large numbers of economically disadvantaged students. The evaluation and supervisory practices associated with the principalship are complex (Derrington & Sanders, 2011; Honig, 2012; Ikemoto et al., 2014). By studying supervisory practices between supervisor and principal—from the principal perspective—insight into these practices can be learned for future supervisory work. In this chapter, I include an overview of the research design, the rationale for the research design, the study context along with research questions and potential benefits, a description of the study participants, an explanation of the data collection techniques, methods for data analysis, and the iterative process of grounded theory. Additionally, I review strategies to ensure trustworthiness and credibility as well as addressed methods to mitigate concerns related to positionality and researcher bias. Finally, I briefly summarize this methods chapter.

Research Design

Because I was exploring principals' descriptions of their needs and supports from supervisors, I chose a grounded theory method for this work. Strauss and Corbin (1994) defined grounded theory as “a general methodology, a way of thinking about and conceptualizing data” (p. 275). Grounded theory design enables a researcher to formulate new hypotheses to fit data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Moreover, Ralph, Birks, and Chapman (2015) clarified the nature of grounded theory as an “awareness of what is, and what is not, grounded theory is essential to

preventing the perception that grounded theory lacks boundaries or limitations in how it is used” (p. 2). At its inception, theorists sought to use grounded theory to reveal patterns of behavior in the data and conceptualize their attributes through constructs (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Through this method of exploration and investigation, I discovered patterns of data which emerged and informed leadership practices. Through the input from high school principals, a grounded theory was constructed.

Glaser and Strauss (1967) created grounded theory as a methodology for qualitative inquiry and research to build a theory from the revealed data. In the 1960s, quantitative methods were more popular, and qualitative research was struggling as a legitimate field for researchers (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Nonetheless, learning from people’s stories, perspectives, and problems has led some qualitative researchers to utilize practices involving collecting qualitative data to apply to an existing theory. The grounded theory paradigm allows researchers to collect data and discover what model emerges from data collected as an investigation of a process or issue, which has not previously, completely been explained; the new theory emerges and becomes grounded in the patterns and relationships the data reveal (Charmaz, 2014).

There are varying versions of grounded theory due to continued exploration of the methodology and refinement of its approach. These variations are based upon the different perspectives that have materialized from researchers who employ this method. Strauss and Corbin (1994) unveiled a more structured approach to research techniques with grounded theory and introduced a systematic method for qualitative information gathering and classification of data. Strauss and Corbin (1994) noted that grounded theory serves as a method for verification and applying more technical conventions to research, rather than staying with emerging concepts and themes in the data.

In the 1990s, Charmaz (2014) established constructivist grounded theory and maintained the earlier tradition of flexibility, but approached constructivist grounded theory as the creation of theory under conditions both known from the constructor and unknown from the research process. Traditional quantitative research is deductive, and researchers form a postulate or hypothesis followed by collecting and testing data based on an existing theoretical framework (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Conversely, constructivist grounded theory is an inductive process rather than a deductive process. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) described inductive reasoning as beginning with a question regarding a process and leading to the development of a theory by holistically examining the phenomenon. The constructivist grounded theory inductive method does not allow the researcher to capture the concrete but to conceptualize what happens by recording exact data or empirical evidence, specifically through collecting rich information through interviews, observations, and other means of capturing the lived experiences of the participants (Charmaz, 2014). Through the steps of the constructivist grounded theory process, participants' perspectives and perceptions are revealed as evidence to build theory explaining the situational dynamics of lived experiences.

Rationale for the Research Design

Kempster and Parry (2011) assert an “emphasis on the context and process of leadership is reflected most strongly in the methodology of grounded theory” (p. 106). The research for leadership has historically been “positivist approaches in the form of a hypothesis testing, quantitative data, and quantitative analysis. However, such tenets of ‘good’ research might not be suitable for addressing leadership from a process and context-based perspective,” (Kempster & Parry, 2011, p. 106). With this in mind, grounded theory provides an alternative method for investigating the lived experiences of leaders and building theory to explain these circumstances.

Constructivist grounded theory is a type of reasoning that starts with studying a range of individual cases. The researcher makes a generalization from the cases that were studied to form a conceptual category (Charmaz, 2014). Constructivist grounded theorists seek to understand difference among research participants and to co-construct meaning with them (Charmaz, 2014). In fact, Charmaz (2014) noted, in constructivist grounded theory, the researcher “adopts the inductive, comparative, and open-ended approach of Glaser and Strauss’s (1967) original statement” (p. 12). The value of constructivist grounded theory exploration involves the discovery of what is actually happening in a situation. This form of research includes people’s experiences with an occurrence or a process. By capturing information to grasp what is happening in a context, the researcher uses rich data from the field. The use of description or details in constructivist grounded theory is mainly to provide a mental model or paint the picture of the interwoven concepts in the developed theory. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), the type of theory that is usually generated is “substantive rather than formal or grand theory. Substantive theory has as its referent, specific, every-day world situation” (p. 31). It can reveal trends about issues or concerns for which no theories apply.

Charmaz’s (2014) constructivist grounded theory served as the basis for this study because it allowed for the creation of theory under conditions both known and unknown. In this case, the conditions of the principals’ supervisors was unknown; the data was revealed primarily from the perspectives of the principals who work with those supervisors. In order to gain insight into the phenomenon of high school leadership and supervisory support needs, as demonstrated from the descriptions given through the lens of the principal, a qualitative approach exposed “how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (Merriam, 2009, p. 6). While qualitative methods are used to gain

in-depth insight, Charmaz (2008) asserted that most qualitative research does not answer the *why* questions. Grounded theory, Charmaz stated, “has had a long history of engaging both *why* questions and *what* and *how* questions” (p. 397).

I followed the grounded theorists’ approach and began my process by gathering data, writing an analysis of that data, and concluding the data analysis by reflecting on the process as a whole (Charmaz, 2014). It was not a linear process, and those themes, ideas, and reflections in the course of the research were recorded and used. As ideas and themes emerged through the process, I embraced them just as grounded theory enthusiasts recommend. The generative nature of the process allowed for new ideas to be inserted as they arose, appeared, and were discovered. Charmaz (2014) explained the steps for constructivist grounded theory to include all the following:

- 1) Conduct data collection and analysis in an iterative process
- 2) Analyze actions and processes rather than themes and structure (data analysis)
- 3) Use comparative methods (trustworthiness and bias)
- 4) Draw on data (e.g., narratives and descriptions) in service of developing new conceptual categories (data analysis)
- 5) Develop inductive abstract analytic categories through systematic data analysis
- 6) Emphasize theory construction rather than description or application of current theories (iterative process data collection and analysis)
- 7) Engage in theoretical sampling
- 8) Search for variation in the studied categories or process
- 9) Pursue developing a category rather than covering a specific empirical topic. (p. 15)

Charmaz (2014) emphasized the importance of employing each stage and decision-making within each stage in order to gather rich data. The steps may be completed in different order depending on the phenomena and context. There is no rigid formula for ensuring the data are rich in detail and quality, but the data need to accurately represent the proper context in which the phenomena occur.

The data collection and analysis in constructivist grounded theory were ongoing, reflective activities that led me, as the researcher, to revisit data in a constant comparative process. Additional data reflection and analysis occurred following multiple rounds of data collection and analysis. Ralph et al. (2015) argued that context matters. Their study reflected as follows:

We locate extant data through the use of contextual positioning as we ascribe to a view that context is inherent to analysis. Contextual positioning enhances the interactivity of the data collection process. No longer is the extant data source a static collection of letters, words, sentences, and paragraphs, rather, it presents as an enlivened thing, suitably contextualized, and ready to contribute to the development of a theory grounded in data in the hands of an informed researcher. (p. 6)

Charmaz (2014) explained, “The endpoint of your journey emerges from where you start, where you go, and with whom you interact, what you see and hear, and how you think and learn. In short, the finished work is a construction – yours” (p. xiv). The construction of this theory mattered in each unique context. Thus, the emergent theories were built around the situations and people who were encountered. In this research, theories were constructed around the prominent needs of high school principals as related to their supervisor support. Specifically in this study,

the constructivist grounded theory method created theory based upon the considerations of leadership and the associated needs of practitioners in the principal position.

Because of a lack of a single theory specific to principal supervisors' work with high school principals who serve schools in communities of poverty, CTG was used to uncover how this principal support and supervision related to the specific context of campus leaders in their respective leadership situations. As leadership, staffing, school environments, and accountability vary by community and in order to understand what is being experienced by high school principals serving in disadvantaged communities, I utilized the constructivist grounded theory approach to examine the principals' perceptions of the internal and/or external support structures needed from their direct supervisors (Charmaz, 2014). I used the qualitative data to construct a grounded model to increase the understanding of the supervisor supports and strategies needed for leaders of high schools in economically disadvantaged communities (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Research Questions

The purpose of this work was to study high school principals working in historically underserved communities in order to determine their supervisory needs. To explore this area using a grounded theory approach, the study was guided by three primary questions:

1. What are the most prominent needs described by high school principals working in communities composed primarily of households of low socioeconomic status?
2. What do principals recommend their supervisors do to assist them in being effective leaders?
3. What are the principals' expectations for their principal supervisors?

Study Participants

The target population included school principals who lead public high schools containing Grades 9 to 12 and located in high poverty communities in Texas. The selection criteria for recruiting principals required that I had to find principals of high schools in which the percentages of students meeting eligibility criteria as economically disadvantaged is 65% or greater as revealed by data from the Public Education Information Management System (Texas Education Agency, 2019). The Texas Education Agency (2019) produces a public report that annually lists all school districts with their corresponding percentages of economically disadvantaged students. From that list, I identified the districts that met the 65% threshold of student numbers. Then I looked up each district website to determine the names and numbers of high schools in each qualifying district; additionally, I located the information on the name and email of the assigned principal. Once the high schools were pinpointed, I investigated each one specifically through public data reported on the Texas Academic Performance Report (TAPR) to confirm enrollment met the aforementioned criteria. The TAPR annually reports student academic performance, staff and student demographic data, and financial information. Thus, the lists were compiled with accurate student percentages to qualify the principals for this study. I also used professional affiliations through the Texas Association of Secondary School Principals and the Texas Association of School Administrators to collect additional contact lists for emailing potential participants who qualified.

Participation was completely voluntary, and participants were able to discontinue all participation the study at any time without penalty (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Before participating with informed consent, the recruited principals received written assurances for

protection of their identities, the identities of their schools, and identities of their school districts (Corbin & Strauss, 2015).

Data Collection

For this study, the data collection process was tiered. Initially, as a Tier 1 strategy, I collected a broader swath of information from a larger group of high school principals in a relatively quick and easy fashion. This Tier 1 data included a questionnaire designed for outreach to a larger sample of participants (Groves et al., 2009). Through this wider collection, more participants were involved to add to the body of research.

For Tier 2, following the questionnaires, participants had an opportunity to volunteer to contribute to the study through an anonymous, intensive interview (Charmaz, 2014; Hendricks, 2017; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). According to Charmaz (2014) intensive interviewing fits the grounded theory model well because both methods “are open-ended, yet directed, shaped yet emergent, and paced yet unrestricted” (p. 85). As interviewees have had varied experiences as high school principals, the open-ended and in-depth exploration associated with intensive interviewing revealed much about their needs and recommendations for their supervisors.

In Tier 3, as the data collection unfolded, I utilized reflective journaling to capture impressions and rich descriptions of the perspectives of the participants that I had engaged in the intensive interviewing and data collection process (Hendricks, 2017; Mertens & Wilson, 2012). Through recording my thoughts and reflections, the journal provided “a way to keep track of the reflective and reflexive inquiry processes an educator engages in while continuously examining values, assumptions, goals, and actions” (Hendricks, 2017, p. 19). By journaling, I reflected and revisited data multiple times to ensure my assumptions and professional experience did not bias the data that I had collected and recorded (Hendricks, 2017; Mertens & Wilson, 2012). This

process enriched the overall process of theory building through my impressions and records of them in the reflective journal.

I then secured approval from the University's Institutional Research Board (IRB), and I began to retrieve data from qualifying high school principals. With the high schools already identified, I engaged in the recruitment of participants by sending email invitations. I also contacted education leaders in my professional networks and colleagues to seek additional information for potentially qualifying participants. I designed the recruitment email with an embedded link so after a principal participant read the email, he/she was able to click on the link and connect to the informed consent page of the electronically distributed questionnaire. The participant had the option to click "yes" to indicate his/her consent to complete the questionnaire.

Questionnaire

The initial questionnaire response set contained five Likert-type items (from strongly disagree to strongly agree) followed by short answer, open-ended response questions. A consistent questionnaire was utilized where all respondents were asked the same questions in the same order for the answers to be collected in a uniform way (Boynton & Greenhalgh, 2004). In the data collection process, I obtained 50 completed electronic questionnaires by emailing potential principals with multiple invitations and follow up reminders. Through this repetitive strategy, the numbers increased to reach the total of 50. The questionnaire asked participants to reflect on the instructional and executive leadership supports provided by their supervisors (see Appendix A). Through peer review (Hendricks, 2017; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), I experimented with the questionnaire to ensure the questions were easily understood and addressed the intended data collection purpose (Groves et al., 2009). I chose the method of utilizing a questionnaire to benefit the study by including more participants, in addition to the interview method. With a

questionnaire, the time constraints were less, and the respondents were able to share their recommendations and experiences with anonymity (Hendricks, 2017). The questionnaire introduced participants to the research and provided a manner in which principal feedback was gained; it then allowed for inviting the participants for further involvement in the study through agreeing to an interview, which is explained next.

Interviews

The second collection method was the interview. Intensive interviews are well matched to constructivist grounded theory; therefore, I selected this type of collection (Charmaz, 2014). The relationship between the questionnaire and interview existed for aligned collection data; however, the questionnaire also was designed as a manner in which I solicited interview participants. Although the process had been developed for recruiting potential candidates for interviews, only 2 of the 7 interviewees participated by means of volunteering at the conclusion of the questionnaire. The other participants agreed to be interviewed as a professional courtesy due to connections with leaders who recommended them for the study. With the interviews, I was able to investigate the participants' perspectives and to gain more in-depth information (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Interviews are a widely supported method for data collection (Charmaz, 2014; Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Hendricks, 2017; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). As noted by Wargo (2014), "Interviews make it easier to humanize your study. You will no doubt gain more insights and better perspectives that would not be so apparent through other evidential sources" (para. 3). For this research the intensive interview permitted participants to recount how they experience an event (Charmaz, 2014). The interview questions uncovered the perspectives and interactions of principals with their supervisors. Interview questions generally seek to uncover the perspectives of an individual, a group, or different groups (Charmaz, 2014; Corbin

& Strauss, 2015; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Hendricks, 2017). Of particular usefulness in constructivist grounded theory, interviews can reveal how and why principals are experiencing an event, and/or a condition. Most qualitative studies need to be focused on the particularities of the local and on the ‘thick description’ of human interactions in that context (Geertz, 1973). By delving into the rich descriptions of principals and their experiences under leadership supervision, these interviews provided a hearty account of what experiences principals have in varying situations with their supervisors.

The interview questions were aligned with the purpose of the study and were devised to gather data about principals’ opinions, their experiences, their needs, and their perceptions regarding the instructional and operational effectiveness advice and coaching provided by their supervisors (see Appendix B). Once the questionnaires were received in multiple batches after many attempts to solicit responses. A few principals indicated their interest in being interviewed, and consequently I sent an interview recruitment email to those who expressed a willingness to be interviewed. These emails were sent to request permission for one-on-one interviews for the study. As the responses did not equal the desired number of interviews needed, I contacted professional references to seek qualified study participants. In many cases, this method served beneficial in attaining participants for the interviews. In both groups, questionnaire volunteers, and networked volunteers, I made telephone calls and texts introduce myself and to secure an interview time and location from any participants who indicated an interest in being interviewed. Participants selected a location convenient for them: 5 interviews were held in private offices at the participants’ respective schools, one was a telephone interview, and the other interview was held in an off-site conference room at a community college where the participant requested to meet.

As part of the essential tasks of planning, organizing, and asking meaningful questions, it was critical to avoid “feelings” questions that inject emotion and induce bias; moreover, avoiding the use of yes or no questions contributed to the richness of dialogue and details for the study (Merriam, 2009). As researcher, I had to be mindful of the kinds of questions I asked, as I was investigating the lived experiences of principals. Therefore, I needed to consider the emotional effects that certain questions might have about their professional support (Agee, 2009; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Principal interviews lasted approximately 45 minutes, and each participant answered open-ended questions. The interviews were audio recorded for accuracy of creating transcripts. Reflections on the data began after each one-on-one interview through the use of a reflective journal (Hendricks, 2017). By adding this reflective component to record my impressions, I captured a greater essence of what the interviewee was communicating, with “comments [that were] over and above factual descriptions of what is going on” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 151). Follow-up interviews were requested and scheduled with 2 interviewees to allow for member-checking of the themes found in the data; these lasted only 20 minutes each. By submitting a summary of the data to participants for corroboration, I adhered to one of the most important methods to validate my research (Charmaz, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Yin, 2009). I ensured the confidentiality of all data and findings by using pseudonyms for participants.

Once each interview was completed, it was transcribed. The transcriptions were intentionally completed as soon as possible to allow for transferring any notations regarding subtle meanings and inferences to the appropriate points on these documents (Charmaz, 2014). Also, I used a recorder application with voice-recognition software; whereby the technology

allowed for the interview to simultaneously transcribe, allowing for simultaneous transcription and avoiding the “parroting” or “re-speaking” for dictation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Reflective Journal

The reflective journaling occurred as an ongoing technique that followed the review of participants’ interviews, transcriptions, and questionnaire input. Through the impressions, wonderings, and understandings of the lived experiences that principals described, I recorded reflections to interact with the data I collected for further clarity of its meaning (Agee, 2009; Hendricks, 2017). As I recorded my reflections, I contributed to the ongoing process of learning about my assumptions and perspectives, while being mindful not to project my bias into the study (Hendricks, 2017; Mertens & Wilson, 2012). Reflexive inquiry in this journaling practice enabled me to interpret the meanings from participants and the relationships of those meanings (Oliver, 2004). Reflective journaling enriched the whole data collection process through utilizing my thoughts as data for the purpose of interpreting principals’ perspectives regarding their supervisor support (Hendricks, 2017).

Data Analysis

The data analysis process operated similarly to having a conversation with the data in order to construct categories from the ideas and issues discussed by the participants (Merriam, 2009). The qualitative triangulated data coming from the preliminary questionnaire, one-on-one interviews, and reflective journal entries was used for data analysis. These multiple data sources were analyzed through a constant comparison method (Charmaz, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) where more data was continuously analyzed to eventually construct theory. Charmaz’s (2014) recommendation to implement “the inductive, comparative, and open-ended approach” guided the analysis process.

Questionnaire

The analysis of the questionnaire followed the constructivist approach for analysis by drawing on the narrative nature of the open-ended questions, comparing them to the interviews and Likert scale answers to serve as data to form conceptual categories (Charmaz, 2014). Initial coding was employed (Charmaz, 2014; Corbin & Strauss, 2015) to analyze the actions described in the questionnaire rather than identifying themes. Charmaz (2014) explains that the coding identifies areas of summary where these categories are named for organizational purposes. “Your codes show how you select, separate, and sort data and begin an analytic accounting of them” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 111).

Interviews

Once the interview data were transcribed, they were then coded and categorized with the utilization of a computer assisted data analysis tool in order to manage the folders, evidence, recordings, and notes. The program assisted in the storage, retrieval, and organization of the mounds of data collected. After the field notes, memos, and reflective entries were reviewed and transcriptions were completed, the process of identifying each principal’s transcript served as a stand-alone case for analysis. Categories, themes, evidence, and ideas were associated with each leader (Charmaz, 2014). By comparing and contrasting each principal’s case, the cross-case analysis was applied to find the common threads among the leaders and their schools (Yin, 2009). Then, I as the researcher made a generalization from the cases that were studied to form a conceptual category (Charmaz, 2014). Constructivist grounded theorists seek to understand difference among research participants and to co-construct meaning with them (Charmaz, 2014).

Constructivist grounded theory, as a type of reasoning, starts with analyzing the data from the range of individual cases, in this case the range of experiences and perspectives was

provided by the interview principals. All interview transcripts were read multiple times in order to get a sense of the whole, and then were coded in a search for patterns and themes. Field notes and analytic memos were used to help me draw nuanced conclusions. Data analysis began with initial coding of the first transcript, and each subsequent transcript was initial-coded sequentially (Charmaz, 2014). I included the following steps where I drew on this data to conceptually categorize the narrative answers and descriptions from the interviewees (Charmaz, 2014; Corbin & Strauss, 2015). According to Charmaz (2014), the ongoing analysis encompasses a next step to take the concepts in their categories and develop inductive analytic categories through a systemic approach of review and use of constant comparative methods.

Reflective Journal

Finally, memo writing and reflective journaling was part of the data to be reviewed to capture the inferences and nuances associated with the interactions and impressions that happened during each interview experience and review of the collective responses to the questionnaire (Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Hendricks, 2017). “In qualitative studies, the ongoing process of questioning is an integral part of understanding the unfolding lives and perspectives of others” (Agee, 2009, p. 431). By questioning the participants, questioning the data, and reflecting on its meaning, I extended my analysis to code reflective data to identify categories and insert them into metaphorical buckets to collect key data points throughout the constant comparative process (Charmaz, 2014; Corbin & Strauss, 2015). The reflections were analyzed where I created categories of wide groups of similar concepts. I followed steps for analytic categories, as well as searched for variations in the studied categories by referring back to the reflections, the notes, and memos, which outlined my reflections and initial coding. As variations were discovered this caused me to go back and compare data for validity; through this iterative process there were

areas of data that did not appear to have a strong foundation, which were reviewed repeatedly for further reflection. Again, more iteration occurred repeatedly to process thoughts, reflections, and conceptual categories; in this progression initial conceptual categories were developed, refined, and ultimately derived from the data. As Charmaz (2014) notes, constructivist grounded theory is not a linear process, and the generative nature of the process allows for new ideas to be inserted as they arise, appear, or become discovered. This process blends data collection and analysis in some steps where the iterative nature of constructing theory becomes complex.

Iterative Process of Data Collection and Analysis

According to Charmaz (2014), “Data you obtain through the iterative process of grounded theory alerts you to the limited, misleading, or fabricated accounts. Such approaches to data collection will help you define the range and types of variation occurring in your data” (p. 89). The iterative process is a large part of the progression of theory constructing which necessitates the constant comparison of data for participants and from the researcher as a reflective constructor of codes, categories, and variations. As variations occur in the analysis of the data, further collection may be warranted at any time in the process (Charmaz, 2014; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Thus, the generative nature of constructivist grounded theory, creates a fluidity of visiting and revisiting data to ensure theoretical plausibility; gathering data with a deep treatment of category construction and precision allows for plausibility where the researcher can identify the participants’ patterns of responses. (Charmaz, 2014).

Trustworthiness and Credibility

By collecting data from multiple sources and constantly comparing and cross-checking data, triangulation occurred which enhanced this study’s credibility and trustworthiness (Yin, 2009). According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), the trustworthiness of a study demonstrates that

the researcher's description or interpretation of the data resonates as accurate with participants. In this study, the multiple methods represented were questionnaires, in-depth interviews, reflective journaling, and follow-up interviews for saturation. By utilizing constant comparative methods in and around these data (Charmaz, 2014), I created systems to avoid bias as data was constantly compared to my journal, to the codes, to the categories, to the concepts and to the participants.

Denzin and Lincoln (2011) discussed data triangulation where multiple methods should be employed in a study to provide consistency across the associated findings from each piece of data. Thus, the utilization of questionnaires, interviews, reflective journals coupled with constant comparative methods brought multiple results to light. These results were cross checked for consistency and plausibility.

Member-checking happened through email and conversations where I shared emergent codes, patterns, or themes from the data with interviewees to obtain feedback on my interpretation of their accounts (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). As data emerged and I reflected on the notes, transcripts and codes, I revisited responses with participants to clarify or "check" their intent with their response. These contacts were in the form of a personal email sent outside of working hours. More feedback was ascertained this way to clarify the accuracy of my conceptual categories as interpreted by the principals' perspectives.

This was critical to ensure credibility to authenticate the researcher's account of the data collected. Validity and reliability of data and research are critical for trustworthiness because research bias must be acknowledged and identified in order to create conditions for trust. Constant monitoring occurred through interpretation and revisiting of the data. I engaged in member checking in order to build credibility. Through the revalidation of data with the

interviewees, I sought to create conditions for confirming true data points. When reviewing the comments and assertions from interviewees, I maintained awareness of what had been coded through constant comparison and the use of the reflective journal; these strategies helped me in recognizing unintended bias. Through triangulation, member checking and disinterested peer debriefing (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Guba & Lincoln, 1989), I worked to mitigate potential impact on findings by acknowledging my position in the context of the study and engaging in actions discussed next to reduce bias.

Positionality and Researcher Bias

I currently hold the position of Chief Academic Officer in a mid-size North Texas 6A school district, which serves a high percentage of economically disadvantaged students. Because I work in the top tier of executive district leadership within a school district, issues of positionality within the study had to be considered. According to Herr and Anderson (2015), positionality occurs “in terms of one’s position in the organization or social hierarchy, and one’s position of power vis-à-vis other stakeholders inside and outside the setting” (p. 52). Thus, as a researcher, I maintained awareness that my past experience as a supervisor of principals may not be similar to the perceptions the principals have about their supervisory experiences within their school districts. In my supervisory role, I support secondary and elementary school principals whose schools have 70% or higher of the student populations receiving federal free or reduced lunch assistance. While I am not the direct evaluator of the school principals, I have executive decision-making influence and supervisory support for their instructional leadership in their respective schools. Much of my professional experience has centered on working with principals who lead schools with historically marginalized and underserved students. Oftentimes, in this role, I have experienced conflict with principals and misunderstandings regarding my sense of

urgency, proactive approach, and specific advice for the campus leader to act decisively for interventions for students who show achievement gaps. From these experiences, I have been motivated to pursue this research; from these experiences, researcher bias must be disclosed and accounted for. Therefore, I did not recruit any educational leaders who serve as principals in the school district in which I am employed.

I also had to be aware that the principals know I hold a supervisory role, requiring me to reassure them that I am a doctoral student collecting data and have no evaluative role regarding their lived experiences within their school districts. I reassured them that participation was completely voluntary, and participants were able to discontinue all participation the study at any time without penalty, including during an interview. I mitigated concerns that could prevent participants' honesty by obtaining informed consent and providing written assurances of my maintaining confidentiality as well as protecting their identities, the identities of their schools, and identities of their school districts.

As part of constructivist grounded theory, I maintained a reflective journal from which I reviewed my observations and thoughts during the constant comparative process of data collection and analysis; by utilizing this method, I lessened bias (Charmaz, 2014; Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Hendricks, 2017). I engaged in utilizing a peer reviewer (Hendricks, 2017; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Mertens & Wilson 2012) to ensure that my coding appeared to realistically convey the meanings found in the data in addition to engaging in member checking, which was discussed in the trustworthiness section.

Summary

In this chapter, I have incorporated a description of the research design and the rationale for the research design of constructivist grounded theory. The study background has been

included, along with research questions and benefits of this investigation. I have outlined the methods of identifying study participants and describing their contributions. Moreover, I have provided an account of the data collection techniques, and the methods for data analysis. Plus, as a prominent part of constructivist grounded theory, I have reviewed the iterative processes that are prevalent in ongoing constant comparative methods to achieve theoretical plausibility. Additionally, I included strategies to ensure trustworthiness and credibility as well as adopting approaches to mitigate concerns regarding researcher positionality and researcher bias.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

This study was conducted to ascertain high school principals' needs for coaching and support from their district-level supervisors to attain academic achievement among economically disadvantaged secondary students. Probing this issue led to discoveries about principals' understanding about how their supervisors might meet their needs for guidance and support. Through questionnaires and interviews, I gleaned insights into the principals' experiences. The following research questions guided the study:

1. What are the most prominent needs described by high school principals working in communities composed primarily of households of low socioeconomic status?
2. What do principals recommend their supervisors do to assist them in being effective leaders?
3. What are the principals' expectations for their principal supervisors?

This chapter contains the major findings of this study based upon the qualitative data collected from 50 open-ended questionnaire respondents, seven in-depth interviews, and the researcher's reflective journal. This chapter describes each principals' account of what was vital to the leaders' successes and what assistance they reported needing from their principal supervisors. The study was informed by the literature in which the principal, as the instructional leader of a campus, can affect student achievement (Louis et al., 2010; Marzano et al., 2005), even though public school principals are inundated with multiple demands as they work to improve student outcomes (Ikemoto et al., 2014; Lavigne et al., 2016). A summary of the participants' school characteristics and experience levels appear next, and the thematic analysis of the data collected follows.

Demographics and Setting

The sample included principals who lead public high schools serving grades 9 to 12 located in high poverty communities in Texas. The principals worked at high schools that were prequalified by the research as containing a student body of at least 65% of students identified as economically disadvantaged through the Public Education Information Management System (Texas Education Agency, 2019). Because respondents were asked about their supervisors, precautions were taken to preserve confidentiality while sharing general demographic information. Additionally, principals' genders and ethnicities were not collected as that information fell outside of the scope of the study.

Qualitative and demographic data were collected through an anonymous online questionnaire. Fifty high school principals who met the criteria for inclusion responded to the questionnaires. In-depth follow-up interviews were conducted with seven high school principals. Six interviews occurred face-to-face, and one was completed by telephone. Table 1 represents the descriptive information about the questionnaire respondents' years of experience and their schools' composition of economically disadvantaged students. The mean, or average, years of experience for the high school principals was 6.3 years, but the mode, which was the most often occurring years of experience among the questionnaire respondents was only 2 years. The additional descriptive statistics including the median and standard deviation (SD) for the years of experience as a high school principal can be seen in Table 1.

The high schools represented by the 50 questionnaire respondents showed a mean percentage of students of economic disadvantage at 77.5%, with an SD that was 14%, so most of the high schools had economic disadvantaged compositions between 65% and 91.5%. In addition, any discrepancy in the 65% student economic disadvantage criteria used with state

education agency data found in the principals' questionnaire responses related to self-reporting prior to the release of updated Texas Education Agency (2019) data. The median and mode reflected that the schools' economic disadvantage percentages reflected the criteria of high poverty high schools among the principals completing the questionnaire.

Table 1

Distribution of 50 Questionnaire Respondents by High School Principal Experience and Campus Profile

Interval Variables	Mean	Median	Mode	SD
Years of Experience as a High School Principal	6.3	4.0	2.0	5.3
Percent of Economically Disadvantaged Students on Campus	77.9	77.5	75.0	14.0

Table 2 provides the descriptive information about the interview participants' years of experience and their schools' composition of economically disadvantaged students. The average years of experience for the seven high school principals interviewed was 3.0 years. Interestingly, the interview participants' years of experience mode was only 2 years, which was equal to the mode for years of experience among the questionnaire respondents. However, the 50 questionnaire respondents had a higher SD of 5.3 years for their years of experience as a principal from the seven interview participants whose SD was 3.2. This means the questionnaire respondents represented more variability in their years of experience than the interview participants.

The high schools represented by the seven interview participants showed a mean for students of economic disadvantage at 87.8%, with an SD that was 4.7%, so most of the high schools had economic disadvantage compositions between 83.1% and 92.5%. The median and

mode reflected that the schools' economic disadvantage percentages showed the criteria of high poverty high schools among the interviewed principals.

Table 2

Distribution of 7 Interview Participants by High School Principal Experience and Campus Profile

Interval Variables	Mean	Median	Mode	SD
Years of Experience as a High School Principal	3.0	2.0	2.0	3.2
Percent of Economically Disadvantaged Students on Campus	87.8	90.0	90.0	4.7

Table 3 shows the frequencies for all years of high school principal of the 50 questionnaire participants. The mode of 2 years was verified by 22% of the questionnaire respondents. Overall, 56% of the 50 questionnaire participants had 5 or fewer years of experience in the role. As well, 36% of questionnaire respondents reported having 2 years or fewer experience as a high school principal.

Table 3

Distribution of Questionnaire Respondents by Experience

Years of Experience	<i>n</i>	%
1	7	14.0
2	11	22.0
3	3	6.0
4	6	12.0
5	1	2.0
6	3	6.0
7	2	4.0
9	4	8.0
10	4	8.0
11	2	4.0
12	1	2.0
13	1	2.0
16	2	4.0
18	2	4.0
22	1	2.0
Total	50	100.0

Table 4 illustrates data from the seven interview participants; these principals showed higher frequencies of less experience as well, with 71% reporting having 2 or fewer years of experience as a high school principal.

Table 4

Distribution of Interviewees by Experience

Years of Experience	<i>n</i>	%
1	2	28.5
2	3	42.9
3	1	14.3
4 to 9	0	0.0
10	1	14.3
Total	7	100.0

When comparing the years of experience between the questionnaire and interview participants, the frequencies range of experience was from 0 to 22 years for the questionnaire respondents and from 1 to 10 years for the interview participants. Over 50% of principals in both groups reported having 5 or fewer years of experience. The data for which the majority of principals had fewer than 5 years of experience suggest that principal tenure at a high poverty school does not frequently span past five years for the participants in this study.

The enrollment numbers in Table 5 reflects the frequencies for school size reported by the questionnaire respondents. Sixty-six percent of the questionnaire respondents served school populations with 500 or fewer students. Only one questionnaire respondent led a large high school over 2,000 students.

Table 5

High School Enrollment from Questionnaire Respondents

Student Population	<i>n</i>	%
0-500	33	66.0
501-1,000	1	2.0
1,001-2,000	15	30.0
Over 2,000	1	2.0
Total	50	100.0

The enrollment numbers in Table 6 depict the frequencies for school size reported by the interview participants. In contrast to the questionnaire respondents, the interview respondents overwhelmingly led schools of 1,001 and more students (87.5%) out of seven participants. Only one interview respondent led a high school of 500 or fewer students.

Table 6

High School Enrollment from Interview Respondents

Student Population	<i>n</i>	%
0-500	1	14.3
501-1,000	0	0.0
1,001-2,000	4	57.1
Over 2,000	2	28.6
Total	7	100.0

Thematic Analysis and Findings

The basis for this study was a constructivist grounded theory approach as this approach allows for the creation of theory under circumstances both recognized and unknown (Charmaz, 2014). In this research, the principals' supervisors are not known, but the data were identified

mainly from the experiences of the principals regarding supports needed from their supervisors. The qualitative approach enabled the uncovering of the needs of high school principals as they led schools with marginalized students (Merriam, 2009). The participants reflected on their needs as high school principals serving high poverty schools and associated their experiences with the supervisor supports they considered most beneficial for them in their leadership context.

Through the data from the interviews with seven high school principals and the written responses from 50 high school leaders, I used line by line open-ended coding to establish core categories about the principals' accounts of their needs and the descriptions of support they want to have from their supervisors. The questionnaire was included to gain a wider viewpoint from a larger sample of participants (Groves et al., 2009). Additionally, I engaged in reflective journaling to record my wonderings and considerations of the opinions of the leaders after participating in each interview process; this allowed me to reflect and process my thoughts upon completing the interviews and examining the transcripts (Hendricks, 2017; Mertens & Wilson, 2012). A database allowed me to organize the data and code it as concepts appeared.

Through line by line coding of both the interview and questionnaire data, categories emerged as the patterns and relationships in the qualitative data formed a foundation for constructive grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014). The data from principals' responses regarding their perspectives and perceptions were compared from identical questions posed at various times to different participants to inform leadership needs. Through studying the codes from a range of individual cases, I was able to create a generalization from the cases that were studied to form a conceptual category (Charmaz, 2014). Throughout the development of conceptual categories, I continued to reflect and reexamine the data to make sure my presumptions and work background did not cause me to misrepresent the collected data (Hendricks, 2017; Mertens &

Wilson, 2012). This process actually forced me to go back through categories and review multiple times, where I also consolidated ideas and concepts in the process of theory building.

By adhering to constructivist grounded theory, I reviewed the differences and similarities among the principals' answers and co-constructed the meaning of what I was reading (Charmaz, 2014). Each leader's interview transcript and questionnaire response sheet served as a case for analysis. By comparing each principal's case in relationship to the others, the cross-case analysis found the mutual recommendations and assertions from each leader based on their schools' context (Yin, 2009). As construction continued, themes did overlap slightly in some areas; however, I was able to discern the nuances of the categories and their specific impact on perspectives as they related to each research question.

For reference to specific participants, each questionnaire respondent received a pseudonym comprised of letters and numbers, based upon the method in which they reported their opinions. Each leader was numbered by order of reply and labeled by initial letters. For example, the first person who responded to the questionnaire was identified as QR1, and the second person to contribute was labeled QR2, and those principals were numerically named through the final participant who was labeled QR50. For the in-depth interviews, the campus leaders were described by pseudonym as Principal 1 (P1), Principal 2 (P2), and listed as such numerically, labeling all seven contributors. These pseudonyms were utilized to protect the identity of the interviewees and questionnaire participants to provide a context for the data attributed to questionnaire respondents and interview participants in the presentation of the findings.

Research Question 1 Findings

This research question asked: What are the most prominent needs described by high school principals working in communities composed primarily of households of low socioeconomic status? The critical supports most often reported as needs formed the following themes: (a) grasping the gravity of needs in a high poverty high school; (b) critical need for high-quality, equitable staffing; (c) realizing the magnitude of resources needed for student support; and (d) advocacy. Table 7 presents the themes, supporting codes, and exemplar quotes.

Table 7

Research Question 1 Themes, Supporting Codes, and Exemplar Quotes

Research Question 1 Theme	Codes in the Theme	Exemplar Quote
Grasp the gravity of needs in a high poverty high school	Needs (132) Understanding (144)	“We are the most at-risk campus in the district with many needs. These needs range from security, to access for emotional and instructional supports, as well as instructional needs that impact students in a positive way.” (QR42)
Know the critical need for high-quality, equitable staffing	Staffing (70) Instruction (73)	“High-quality staff is part of the highest need, and that’s going to be the greatest impact that we are going to make with students.” (P4)
Realize the magnitude of resources needed for student support	Students (83) Student Achievement (58) Resources (44)	“We have students that are dealing with issues such as pregnancy, drugs, family problems, immigration and stress. It [stress] has always been in the background of the demographics I serve, but now it’s an even more sensitive subject.” (P6)
Be an advocate	Advocacy (59)	Supervisors “need to spend more time with us to try and help us and understand our situation, so that they can go to the district and advocate for what our needs are, based on our situation.” (P5)

Grasp the gravity of needs in a high poverty high school. A significant theme reported by principals is a need for their supervisors to have an accurate understanding, grasp, or awareness about the difficulty that exists in supporting the severe needs of students living in poverty in their lives and in their schools. The principals reported having paramount requirement for their supervisors to understand the challenges of leading a high poverty high school and to properly advocate for the intense level of support required for their schools' contexts. Respondent QR45 noted, "I do feel at times that our supervisors are not fully aware of how many things are required at the high school level these days." QR23 stated, "It is important to understand the needs of the campus and assist in providing resources, instructional trainings, and staffing that will allow us to meet the needs of our students." In addition, P1 described these needs as follows:

A lot of times, campuses that have high percentages of free and reduced lunch [students] sometimes don't have the different resources that other campuses may have. We don't have the same alumni base that other campuses may have. We don't have access to certain things that other campuses may have.

The gravity of the unmet needs can also negatively impact the school environment as stated by QR10, "I don't think you can understand the situation of a low-income school until you have been in it. No one wants to work there, and students are unmotivated." On the other hand, increased supervisor understanding has value for the principals regarding their experiences. In relaying this sentiment, P5 complimented her past and present supervisors, saying:

Having the resources available so we can call them and say, "Okay I need this. Who do I contact about that?" They're being helpful with that...the supervisor helps me navigate the instructional support from the district and gets access to resources.

The principal leaders collectively indicated having many needs for resources and support. The vast majority concurred to having a wide, encompassing spectrum of needs in all areas of their high poverty high schools. This prevalence was explained by QR40, “They understand the job we do and the needs of our campus (as does our Board). They provide continual support and encourage us with a budget that allows us to do what we need to do for student success.” Another example of the power of understanding was mentioned by QR16, “I would say my immediate supervisor has a grasp of the complexities of campus administration and the many facets that must be managed at this level.” Many principals voiced needing their supervisors’ understanding; P7 captured it simply, “Being supportive and truly understanding the needs of our campus will be what I would want from my supervisor.”

Collectively, principals expressed that their supervisors need to understand that the work of school leadership as it is accomplished at the campus level in a current, real-time, and day-to-day context. “My supervisor needs a better understanding of our enrollment demographic compared to other schools in our district and in the state, to give commensurate support,” said QR5. These high school principals emphasized that supervisor understanding in the aforementioned areas has potential to result in appropriate support, including advocacy, to be timely, to be effective, or to be in place at all. This specific supervisor awareness was desired by the sample of principals who would like their supervisors to campaign for their campuses at the district level for the purpose of improving the students’ learning conditions in their respective school settings.

Critical need for high-quality, equitable staffing. A common response among the interviewees involved their intense need for their districts to emphasize high-quality equity and ensure they had staffing support in their economically disadvantaged high schools. They

reported that, oftentimes, district staffing allocations are not proactively set to anticipate growth or to compensate for freshman repeaters. When appropriate staff were not increased based upon projections of annual enrollment trends, these leaders criticized their districts' staffing practices as causing their class sizes to be overcrowded and limiting their hiring of necessary teachers in the fall semester after school began. Moreover, the participating high school principals related that they could not easily find high-quality educators to teach in their high poverty schools. Consequently, the campus administrators confided that when they hire certified teachers and train them, these teachers leave as soon as possible to work in a more affluent high school. Thus, principals in low income high schools have seen the cycle of less experienced teachers comprising the majority of their personnel continue.

Repeatedly, the participating school leaders referenced the need for having increased numbers of high-quality teachers and opportunities to offer smaller class sizes to students. First and foremost, the principals agreed that high-quality teachers are essential to student success. "For me, that's pretty much what I would need. I mean, high-quality teachers number one thing, I'm telling you," added P4:

That is part of the highest need, and that's going to be the greatest impact that we're going to make with students. Right now, there's a vacuum of high-quality teachers, and then specifically there's a vacuum of high-quality teachers in ELA [English Language Arts]. So, we're stuck.

P6 explained her perspective about staffing, "One high need is the hiring of quality staff which are in high poverty areas. Sometimes there is an abundance of brand new teachers or alternative certified teachers." P5 also asserted, "I believe the staffing is the biggest need because when you have varied backgrounds of students, you need support for students with emotional needs. You

need support with students that are limited English proficient, and in high school, the staffing for that kind of need is lacking sometimes.” P1 stated his agreement with teachers and class size needs:

As a principal, there’s a lot of times you need support in a lot of different areas. And you need someone to be an advocate for you. What I mean by that is like for example, this year, when we were doing some cuts of teachers, we really needed the teachers. I mean, we’re one of the schools that have one of the highest language center populations in the district. Kids have come in with a lot of great needs academically, so we’re not a school that can afford to have high class sizes.

Of note, principals agreed that district staffing does not always reflect the needs for smaller class sizes to support struggling secondary students and students who need English as second language (ESL) instruction. P5 explained, “When I got the numbers, I felt like that I didn’t get the resources I should have received, and now I feel like I am going have to compete with my peers with bigger class sizes, more disgruntled staff because they’ve had increased class sizes.”

For three of the interviewees a similar situation regarding the hiring of staff at the start of the school year occurred. These three participants (P1, P4, and P5) revealed that their districts made the principals wait for long periods of time before approving the hiring of needed Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) teachers even though the schools’ student enrollment projection data demonstrated the need for more positions. In those three situations, teaching positions were not approved until late in the fall semester and this dilemma forced the schools to operate with larger class sizes for at least the first 6 weeks of instruction. P4 emphasized:

I don’t mind being accountable, but I need these resources. I kept on giving him (principal supervisor) a hard time. I texted him on Monday and said, “Okay, we’re six

weeks in and I still don't have my four FTEs... Six weeks in. Come on! I can't be a successful school, when you tell me we're going to wait and look at which kids show up. Okay? They were here the first week of school. I'm understaffed. Why do I have to wait till the [end of the] 6 weeks to get my FTEs?

From the principals' perspective, hiring practices illustrated a lack of supervisor understanding and district support for staffing in economically disadvantaged schools.

P6 was adamant that she needed every single staff member, "Well, of course in terms of staffing. I need my supervisor to advocate that every position that I had here, it is a necessary one and because of the high need, 86% low socioeconomic. I would advocate that my supervisor advocate for staffing to remain the same and the budget cuts to be made elsewhere." P5 experienced difficulty with staffing as mentioned, "Now, because we are also short on teaching positions [staffing], the one vacancy I had recently, now that one, I'm going have to convert it into a teacher position instead to try to lower my class sizes." Moreover, staffing projections do not take into account, attendance failures or grade failures, which are more widespread in high schools. To explain, P4 shared:

Well, it [staffing] doesn't work that way in high school, because then some of those kids that were taking algebra are not just going to move up. They might have passed algebra, but then if they don't get credit [for lack of attendance], then at the end of the semester, guess what? We're going to add them back to an Algebra I class. Now this fills your classes with repeaters.

Again, an understanding was emphasized so that supervisors could garner more support for the schools where marginalized students need better teachers and smaller teacher to student ratios.

Teacher turnover rates affected staffing according to the research respondents. P6, simply stated, “Another big need is probably to be able to retain teachers.” Another brief statement from P7 was, “In a high poverty school, we have a high turnover rate.” P3 summed it up with his depiction of the issues at hand:

One issue is turnaround of staff. So, I mean, like all of my EOC teachers right now are all new this year. So, it’s like the grind, kind of... Either the teachers are motivated to apply for the positions because they’ve done well in this setting, or there may be teachers that say ‘Hey, look. This is not what I was looking for, so I’m going somewhere else.’ So, my new teachers that are coming in is a high number. I mean, I think I got 31 new teachers this year... it’s a- revolving door.

More insight was provided by P5, “Specific to teachers leaving, I think I mean probably the only thing that would help with that is to try to lower classroom sizes and just because of all the extra stuff that teachers are dealing with.”

P1 said, “In thinking about the schools that really don’t need the teachers that struggle the most and a lot of times, they will rotate teachers like that to schools like us [high poverty high schools]. It’s kind of like purgatory. It’s kind of like [the transfer] teacher’s punishment. You know? But really, we need the most talented individuals that help kids.” The overall sentiment captured from these leaders was that they need their supervisors and districts to support them in finding high-quality teachers to want to come work at their schools and to remain at their schools; this takes smaller class sizes and a focus on hiring and placing the best equipped teachers while simultaneously supporting them with smaller class sizes.

Realize the magnitude of resources needed for student support. The principals participating in both the questionnaire and the interviews collectively brought up needing to meet

students' needs by having a wide array of resources. "The most prominent need concerning underprivileged students is resources," said P1. To add to this, P2 explained:

I need supervisor understanding and support for poverty issues that affect students inside and outside of my school community. Does the supervisor understand what the needs of the students are when they're not in the school district...when they're not in a school building, and are we following through with fulfilling those needs?

The significance of resources becomes critical for schools of economic disadvantage because the schools, the students, and the surrounding communities are lacking adequate resources to be competitive academically and in extra-curricular areas when compared to other high school students in schools of more privilege. P3 clarifies this critical circumstance:

You got a community out there that's in survival mode. They got big issues—like are we going to have lights? A lot of our kids' parents may be incarcerated or deported. So, that kind of puts a situation where we're having issues with the student, and we call home and may not be able to contact anybody.

According to the respondents, students who grapple with these challenging situations are not always ready to learn; they face extenuating circumstances linked to poverty which is out of their control, and this takes a toll on the social support and economic resources at the school. P5 explained, "Sometimes, they come to us with needs for clothing or their house burned down, and they need assistance, or in some cases they are identified as homeless. We have to have strategies to help with those things." Furthermore, P3 echoed this:

Probably more lack of funds to be able to do things for the students that maybe you wouldn't normally have funds for. We have a couple of housing developments, and we have four homeless shelters—students from those living areas come to our school. We

have a language center which has students that are new to the country, so specific to that, students may have some needs with supplies, with clothing, things like that that there's not really a budget for that.

P4 agreed that the lack of district's funding for resources creates demanding conditions for staff to help students. He said principals need to understand "the allocation of resources. It's a district issue. It's not a one person issue; it's a district issue. I think, not just my supervisor, but the whole encompassed district, has an issue with the equity thing." P4 shared his perspective about supervisory support for students in low income schools, "You want this and that, but then you're not providing the resources that you need to provide for my campus, for me to be successful."

Be an advocate. The principals collectively discussed how increased district understanding helps campus leaders and explained that in many situations, district leaders do not understand the specific needs of their schools. In the questionnaire and in the interviews, principals discussed needing their supervisors, clearly and overtly, to recognize the lack of resources available for meeting their high school students' needs and to provide what marginalized students need to succeed. Questionnaire respondent QR17 emphasized, "We need resources, and an understanding of my challenges; I need my supervisor to be my advocate at the district level for resources, personnel, training, etc." "Allow me to provide my faculty with the resources, physical, technological, and otherwise, that will allow them to concentrate on educating our students and closing learning gaps," was the advocacy requested by QR38. The theme of advocacy was reported as an actionable behavior that supervisors could provide regarding championing them for resources, staffing, and services associated with ensuring

student achievement among high school students of lower socioeconomic status who were marginalized.

Recommendations for advocacy ranged from the aforementioned areas of truly “getting it” and understanding what complexities surround the needs in a high poverty high school to championing communication to garnering better district understanding of the resources, staffing, and needs that exist for these leaders, their faculty members, students, and communities. P4 suggested, “Bring people together, to really talk about the needs that you have as a high school principal in a high-poverty campus with other high school principals, so that can be a way to capture support at the district level for communication. Yes, because they [district leaders] need an understanding.” This level of recommendation illustrates that principals are disconnected in telling their stories to upper administration, and they need their supervisors to make this happen, resulting in increased understanding and increased support. A final quote from QR42 summarized the passion that principals have in wanting true advocacy to improve their schools:

I need my supervisor to act as a liaison with the district office to fight for items that I need at the campus level in terms of staffing, materials, professional development, security, etc. I need my supervisor to sit at the table at the executive level with the superintendent and fight for the needs of me and my campus, so they can be approved.

Through supervisor understanding, advocacy was considered a key component of telling the accurate story of the needs in a high poverty high school.

Research Question 2 Findings

This research question asked: What do principals recommend their supervisors do to assist them in being effective leaders? In this exploration, principals reported their recommendations that formed the following themes: (a) supervisors and central office need to

realize that principals are not superhumans and (b) be a trusted thought partner who offers feedback and reflective support. Table 8 presents the themes, supporting codes, and exemplar quotes.

Table 8

Research Question 2 Themes, Supporting Codes, and Exemplar Quotes

Research Question 2 Theme	Codes in the Theme	Exemplar Quote
Realize that principals are not superhumans	Prioritizing (39) Leadership (123)	“[It’s expected] that I <i>walk on water and leap tall buildings with a single bound</i> all while eliminating the achievement gap, managing all student/staff/parent conflicts, and monitoring instruction on a daily basis.” (QR50)
Be a trusted thought partner	Relationship (55) Trustworthy (59) Feedback (21)	“The best supervisors actually empower the principal, perhaps even become <i>thought partners</i> with the principal regarding campus improvement.”(P6)

Realize that principals are not superhumans. Principals recommended that supervisors realize the enormity of the high poverty high school principal job. Also, they described undergoing sensations of impossibility for finishing every task or goal required of them by their school districts. One illustration regarding the multi-faceted nature of the job was stated by QR48, “My supervisors expect for me to provide a safe learning environment for all students and adults alike. My presence in hallways, classrooms, and community events is essential. Bottom line the campus principal must lead from the floor and not from behind a desk.”

Additional respondents described their frustrations over the vast amount of work that exists in leading a high poverty high school to success. The following quote from P7 represents the frustration, “This is way too much work for any person to do and try to be sensitive at the same time.” Another reinforcement of this theme was indicated by P3, “I think principals get

frustrated because there are so many different things that are thrown at us.” Finally, QR50 summed up the defining aspects of the theme of *realize that principals are not superhumans*: “[It’s expected] that I walk on water and leap tall buildings with a single bound all while eliminating the achievement gap, managing all student/staff/parent conflicts, and monitoring instruction on a daily basis.”

While principals in this study explained their awareness of the “hefty” amounts of work they must perform as high school principals, they reported that their supervisors needed to understand that principals are not superhumans. The principals, as QR28 expressed, needed their supervisors to realize “the challenges we are experiencing” and not “to add one more task without good guidance or time to effectively grow.” Similarly, the participants expressed that the volume of work they are expected to perform is unrealistic to expect of any one person. QR10 wrote: “The expectations are unreal. You are expected to do everything under the sun with limited resources.” P7 reported working on tasks “all over the place. And so, I’m not saying that they don’t know exactly where our weaknesses are, but I don’t think that we’re thoughtful, or they’re thoughtful about all the things that they’re expecting us to do.”

QR4 noted that it took a year to learn to manage the overwhelming number of tasks involved in this role: “Having completed my first year as principal, I feel as if I finally have my head above water (or at least my nose). I want to know I have support and resources to do my job well.” Similarly, QR50 pronounced that a principal supervisor should “never tell a current principal what you did in the past regarding academic achievement. The game has totally changed.” These statements contributed to the overarching theme—*realize that principals are not superhumans*. The principals in this study conveyed their need for supervisors to recognize how voluminous demanding the work is for leading high poverty high schools.

Within the theme of principals wanting their supervisors to realize that they undergo stress levels that would suggest they are superhumans, the principals, across both the interviews and questionnaire respondents, discussed their concerns with the intensity of pressure placed upon school principals, particularly in the high school context, they received from their school districts. QR45 explained, “I do feel, at times, that our supervisors are not fully aware of how many things are required at the high school level these days.” P5 reported that the demands placed on principals of high schools more complicated than the demands placed on principals of other schools:

[The numerous demands were] hard for me to promote to be a principal of a high school. There was so much “high school only” stuff. So, at first, I felt very [unsure]... I was calling my supervisor too much, and I feel like my self-confidence wavered a little bit. I was like, wait a minute, I’ve been at this [principal work] 12 years. Why am I struggling?

QR40 discussed how the school district administrators wanted all goals met without fail:

All of my goals are met. We continue to have a 0% dropout rate and a 100% completion rate that aspiring principals work under my direction and that my campus continues to be a top performing one in spite of our high at-risk population.

In another example, QR7 wrote about the district’s myriad expectations for having “effective campus leadership, student-centered decision making, maintaining a positive environment for our faculty, staff, and students, clear and consistent communication with parents, students, and community members.” QR24 included comments about principals needing to “Meet Standards on state accountability, communicate the district’s vision, enforce the student code of conduct, retain employees, and be a conduit between the community, school, and administrative office.” These areas of responsibility are abundantly complex and encompassing.

As noted by QR4, “We have a ton of new initiatives and policies in place this year to the extent that it’s almost overwhelming. Give us a little time to get our feet under us before throwing something else at us.” The two key codes for principal supervisors to realize that principals are not superhumans were prioritizing and leadership. Each code’s contribution to the theme receives attention here.

Prioritizing. QR4’s comment reflected the need for support in prioritizing the multiple initiatives that generate from central office. P4 emphasized this prioritization issue:

I can speak very clearly about what my needs are on my campus, more clearly and more passionately than what probably my supervisor would speak to the Chief. I’d say, “Hey, we’re drowning them with X, Y, and Z. I need this. These are my priorities that we need.” I feel that the same way in conversation with other principals we talk to. I don’t need to sit through 3 hours of PLC training. Okay? I don’t need to sit through that. You know what I mean? I just don’t need to do that. You’re wasting my time. We’re not being selective and targeted on what we need done.

P5 expressed a slightly different perspective on the phenomenon, “Sometimes it’s like we get to do stuff that other people could have done. Or there should be a better way of getting things done that wouldn’t be as cumbersome for us principals.” Finally, another aspect of principals not being superhumans was explained by Q42:

I am to fulfill all aspects of a building principal as outlined in my job description, specifically to be an instructional leader across the campus and to make sure that all systems in a school are properly functioning and helping ensure that any district programs are promoted and implemented.

As part of the principals are not superhumans theme, the principals reported not having enough time to tackle the multiple loads of work for maintaining a safe environment, improving instruction, keeping program compliance, and implementing district initiatives, to name a few. The principals in this study wanted support for prioritizing the multiple demands and areas of leadership they were required to address. P4 echoed the need for assistance by acknowledging, “I know I’ve got to do better. I know we’ve got to do better, but I also need help.”

Thus, the participants wanted help prioritizing initiatives in order to improve their effectiveness for attempting to fulfill their respective, superhuman leadership requirements. P4 delineated that when student achievement was the primary focus and “everything else needs to be pushed aside. Because in being a principal, you get, ‘Let’s do this template. Let’s do this worksheet. Let’s do this new flavor, and it all just starts piling up.’” Q14’s response regarding the need for assistance with prioritizing involved having “very busy, demanding schedules, but sometimes it feels as if there isn’t enough time to implement new plans because we are meeting to discuss implementing something else.”

Leadership. QR17 expressed about the principal supervisor that “I would like him to help me with a more focused approach on certain leadership areas and provide me with that training.” P4 summed it up by sharing, “Let’s just focus on right here. Because you start giving me piles and piles of ... stuff, I’m not going to do it. I’m going to get bogged down.” Again, the consensus among the participants was for principal supervisors to prioritize and focus in order to enable them to effectively manage the abundance of tasks required of high school principals in high poverty schools.

In many cases, the participants explained that various central office staff members request items from schools and reported having to be purposeful in navigating compliance for

their respective programs. At low performing schools, two interviewees (P3, P7) conveyed that they are required to meet added expectations and provide increased numbers of reports about student achievement to their district leaders; they also explained that more people are involved in making demands on the principal's time. To illustrate the complexity of leading an Improvement Required (IR) high school, P7 described the following:

We have several different strands the District is expecting all of the IR schools to use. So, we have *Leverage Leadership* building—our book study. We also have Get Better Faster, that's another book study. We have a non-profit partnership that has provided us with instructional coaches, and we also have the Education Service Center coaches that will be working with the teachers. So, when I was speaking to my director last week, she said, "You have to just figure out all these different expectations from those four areas. You have to figure out how to merge it all together, so you won't duplicate at each step."

The second IR school principal, P3, described having experiences with the situation:

A lot of those things take you out of the school, so now you're taking a team over here. Now, you're taking a team over there, and now you're doing this and that. You got to go to this meeting and that meeting. So, it's like all of it is helpful, but at a school like this, it's kind of like every day that you're out, it might cost you 2 days to get back where you need to be. So, I mean the scheduling piece and the planning piece for an individual, it becomes more critical and much more. You got to be real surgical and intentional about how you spend your time.

The participating principals demonstrated they must lead in multiple areas of responsibility and hold the accountability for the requirements of these numerous areas. The profusely complex demands, as if principals were superhumans, placed upon principals

reverberated through the comments made by the participant principals. They shared a need for receiving adequate time to focus with navigating their multiple responsibilities. Thus, the concepts of prioritization and clear areas of focus, coupled with the consequences of superhuman leadership expectations, created leadership complexities for principals in this study.

Be a trusted thought partner. The principals conveyed needing supervisors to *be a thought partner* (P6) who could collaborate with them in a trusting relationship. The participating high school principals reported that it was important to have a relationship built on trust and a working relationship with their supervisors. Essentially, for the trusting supervisor-to-principal thought partnership to occur, the principals needed to have a relationship built on support and trust and to receive feedback with their supervisors.

Offer a relationship built on support and trust. P1 noted, “I really think it comes down to a relationship.” P4 explained, “We have a pretty good working relationship. He [principal supervisor] just gives me guidance. I’ll ask him for guidance on certain things. ‘Hey, how would you handle this situation?’ This happened, and stuff like that, you know.” Another aspect of the relationship as a thought partnership was described by P5:

I’ve been very blessed with good supervisors that I feel like I can tell them how I’m feeling. I can tell them, “Okay, this is how I feel.” I can hear my supervisor ... going, “Now it’s ok.” I’d be like, I know, but I just have to let it out.

In a trusting thought partnership, the principals’ supervisors performed beneficial roles of listening to and supporting their principals. Similarly, P4 discussed:

Being comfortable in our relationship with our supervisors is important. We can say how we’re feeling, not be judged, and move forward. Still you know, like, okay, I know that

was my boss, and of course we stay professional, but you can really say, “That’s not right.” The bonus is you feel like they understand you.

The principal participants in this study reported that they used supervisor feedback as an aid for thinking through their individual processes of leadership and decision making. A principal supervisor who was available just for talking through or reflecting about situations benefitted principals like P6, who said, “Sitting down as in a collegial way to say, ‘Okay, I’m looking at this data and you’re looking at this data. Let’s talk about this.’ Those supervisors have more success with me.” Through thought partner collaboration, the principals described attaining successful results in making decisions as leaders.

P4 explained being able to make decisions by talking them through with the principal supervisor with reflection and support and without judgment. P4 reiterated that the concept of “talking it out” with his principal supervisor has enabled him to produce success as a leader. QR14 wrote about having a “good working relationship” with the principal supervisor who was “not a ‘helicopter,’ but she is also very involved.”

The interviewees stated that as a trusted thought partner, the supervisor’s listening and coaching for understanding was impactful. P1 shared:

Just having someone to listen in with an empathetic ear... it’s comforting. “I understand what you’re going through. I hear your point of view and I’m going to try to do what I can do.” And I think that even if the answer may be no or “I can’t do what you’re asking me to do,” I think that still makes you feel like, “You know what? That person gave an honest effort to try to support me in what I’m trying to accomplish.”

Correspondingly, P6 explained, “It’s about listening to [campus principals] and maybe probing and having them do the reflective practice.” Moreover, QR25 expressed the need for

having “a listening ear when issues arise.” P1 echoed QR25 with greater depth of response: “From a principal perspective, I think the number one thing that would be helpful to me would be support. And sometimes that support comes in just the form of a listening ear.”

P1 emphasized leadership coaching through “listening, being supportive, understanding what the principal’s visions are, and trying to figure out how to coach those.” Furthermore, P6 reported, “My expectation for a principal supervisor is to actively listen.” The experience of supervisors listening to principals as a form of relational support was described as valuable to the study participants. Ultimately as high school leaders, the principals stated that reflecting on practice with a supervisor as a thought partner allowed them to gain guidance for ensuring improvement would occur. The following comment by P6 exemplified theme of be a trusted thought partner: “The best supervisors actually ... empower the principal, perhaps even become thought partners with the principal regarding campus improvement.”

The participants identified reflective discussions with their supervisors helped them to reach solutions to problems, particularly when having reflective discussions about data and “talking out” their options with their supervisors. P1 illustrated the nature of the thought partner dialogue:

How to figure out how to coach the principals to have a much more intentional approach because you [the principal] can have a vision and say that’s where I want to be, but what are going to be the steps to get you there? And so, I think my supervisor did a good job of just making me really refine those steps ... through his questioning.

QR15 emphasized the following aspect of the thought partnership when writing about the principal supervisor: “He seems to understand what I am trying to do and is always a helpful

partner in accomplishing our goals.” QR48 wrote about utilizing supervisor partnership support by noting, “He helps with ideas and brainstorming.”

P6 offered another angle on the thought partnership: “If the supervisor doesn’t really take time to hear you out, they just assume it’s the same scenario. So, the time to understand the whole picture of our needs, I think, is important.” For P6, the supervisor needs to spend time gaining clarity in order to be a good partner with the principal. Summarily, P1 added:

It’s important for really trying to understand what [is] the vision of the principal. As an executive director or assistant superintendent, I think you try to hire talented people. You give them freedom with fences, but you hire them to use their talent. So, your job is really to kind of support them and guide them when necessary, but more so give them the resources that they need to be successful. So, I think it all starts with getting to know what it is that [principals] want to do, where they are. What does he need? What does she need? And just trying to give support to them as quickly as you possibly can.

The participants mentioned that they used series of questions and dialogue with their supervisors to gain introspection and to solve their own issues or “put together” their own “game plan.” The reflection aspect of the thought partnership with the principal supervisor was helpful to P1 who said:

It’s more about, “Okay, you’re the principal, what’s the plan? Here’s what the data say. What’s going to be your plan?” It’s less about us planning it out together and more about that supervisor kind of asking the right questions to make the [principal] start to think reflectively about what plan they’re going to have in place. At least for me, that’s been the best relationship.

Feedback. Supervisors serving as a thought partner benefitted the participants. The participants noted that when their principal supervisors used questions as a series of steps or stages or “wonderings,” the principals gained opportunities to reflect, think about all aspects of a process, and make informed decisions. The participants reported that answering a progression of thoughtful questions while talking through issues and initiatives was important to pausing and reflecting as empowered principals. The principals conveyed that by taking the time to model this activity, the supervisors conveyed that spending time with principals was as important as providing feedback. The time supervisors spent allowed principals to use the trust partnership for deeper reflection and better decision making. P1 illustrated the benefits of the supervisor asking questions as follows:

He would ask a lot of questions, good questions, probing questions. He’d give you a lot of positive, start with the positives. Even the way he framed it like it wasn’t like what the negative things are, it was like his wonderings. You know that’s how he would phrase it. “My wonderings are...What about this?” And he would phrase that in a question for reflection. It was a lot less threatening. (P1)

Another aspect of the principal supervisor being a thought partner related by principals in this study involved using the exchange of honest feedback for building trust. Principals recommended supervisors support them by providing feedback. P2 described wanting “that genuine, authentic feedback.” Through the feedback loop that the supervisor-to-principal thought partnership allowed for, principal supervisors began to understand the complexities involved in meeting the leadership requirements of principals in high poverty high schools. P1 reflected on the feedback loop: “It’s important to be able to run some ideas by your director or whoever’s the one supporting you to be that sounding board ... and they can give you some feedback.”

Feedback offered a way for the principals to gauge their success. P6 said, “Setting up structured meetings, feedback meetings, every month is one way where you can really just almost get off the campus and look at some data points, common assessments and that sort of thing.”

The principals described receiving feedback as an important tool in their leadership journey. Feedback from their supervisors allowed them to grow professionally and refine certain improvement areas in their high schools. P6 shared this sentiment:

I think in all cases of every supervisor I’ve had. I don’t think they have a problem with identifying issues that might impact the school itself. So, I’m not fearful of that feedback.

I think constructively we can work on those things together in the best of cases.

Furthermore, the principals appreciated receiving feedback during meaningful conversations. P2 explained:

If I’m given real, genuine, authentic direction, and we have real, genuine, authentic conversations, then I feel like I’m getting the kind of critical feedback that I thrive on. Personally, you tell me, “You need to work on this.” I’ll throw everything I have into that.

Principal supervisors investing their time in providing actionable feedback resonated with the high school principals as an essential aspect of their development as leaders. Feedback provided during data conversations also helped them grow as instructional leaders. P5 conveyed:

We all want our school to be at its optimal performance level and all that, and everybody has to get evaluated and things like that. But we need feedback that is actionable feedback, like actual examples of how to make things better.

QR4 identified receiving feedback through classroom walks as meaningful for teacher and administrator learning:

I just completed my first year as high school principal, and the support received from my supervisor has been remarkable. My suggestion would be for our central office staff to conduct “paired learning walks” with our administrative team so that we can learn from one another. It is critical that we calibrate so that our teachers are provided meaningful feedback.

P7 described classroom walks as valuable for obtaining actionable feedback:

Once we walk classrooms, she gives me action steps, those that she wants to see implemented the next week. And she always makes sure that she talks to my coaches and AP’s [assistant principals], because we’re all about building leadership capacity.

P3 also commented on classroom walks and supervisor feedback:

Now, that I’ve got new supervision, and the school went into the next level of IR; so right now, we’re doing scheduled walks and some feedback in regards to what’s going on in the classroom. We’re having directors from departments come back and also do some walks to give us feedback on what’s happening in the classrooms. So, that feedback is helpful before we come back to PLC, share it with teachers.

In sum, the practice of feedback through dialogue, walking classrooms, discussions or improvement has been positively reported as a recommendation by study participants. The principals said that experiencing the whole process of having trusting relationships with supervisors who listened to their concerns, asked probing questions, and talked through things with them created a valuable, trusting thought partnership.

Conclusion. Finally, the principals participating in the questionnaire and interviews referred to trust, relationship, and feedback as the main indicators of having supervisors who were effective thought partners. QR35 wrote about principals wanting to have “someone to

believe in them!!” P2 noted that every principal needs a supervisor “who is willing to be a partner” for ensuring leadership growth. P6 highlighted feedback in conversation as “one way to coach someone up.” Finally, P1 concluded this theme with the following apt metaphor: “If I’ve been in a few fox holes and a person comes through for me, then that just builds that trust. I know that when they give me feedback, it’s about growing me and not necessarily about something else.”

Research Question 3 Findings

This research question asked: What are the principals’ expectations for their principal supervisors? In this exploration, principals reported their recommendations that formed the following themes: (a) understand the uniqueness of school contexts and (b) communicate and maintain clear expectations. Table 9 depicts the themes, supporting codes, and exemplar quotes that answered this research question.

Table 9

Research Question 3 Themes, Supporting Codes, and Exemplar Quotes

Research Question 3 Theme	Codes in the Theme	Exemplar Quote
Understand the uniqueness of school contexts	Authentic (27) Communication (64)	“What’s good for one high school may not be good for this high school, depending on the all those variables, like socioeconomic status, neighborhood, ethnicity...all those things.” (P6)
Communicate and maintain clear expectations	Expectations (81) Clarity (23)	Principals would like “clearer expectations that are not based on the way the wind is blowing, but rather consistent with what we want to accomplish in regard to our mission and vision” (QR44)

Understand the uniqueness of school contexts. Of the 57 respondents, one-third reported they wanted supervisors to realize the milieu of each unique campus. Their comments

came to light regarding their thoughts that in each school's individual situation, there are needs that do not exist in other schools. In essence, context matters. QR5 noted the principal supervisor "doesn't think there's a significant difference between my demographic and other schools." However, as QR25 explained, "every campus has nuances that need to be considered when supporting it. Sometimes things seem very black and white to supervisors, but there is usually more to the story." The overriding sentiment, as expressed from participating principals, involved the background distinctions that occur between each high school, which has its own unique situation.

Know that schools are not created from "cookie cutters." The theme of uniqueness of context was expressed by two principal interviewees who used the analogy of schools as cookie cutters, cautioning that schools are not the same "cookies shaped from the same exact cookie cutter." P6 explained having an expectation for the supervisor to take note of the unique situations schools face and to forego generalizing all schools as "cut" the same: "Everybody looks the same, and we're all the same cookie. We get a cookie cutter, and we're all cut the same; however, we are quite different." Correspondingly, P7 related the cookie cutter analogy with another perspective:

We cannot continue to go forward with saying, "Okay each school will get X amount of dollars," because we're not a cookie-cutter school. We have to look at the situation of the school. We need to know how the kids are scoring academically.

The principals in this study noted that they expected their supervisors to realize each of their schools' individual circumstances. QR13 illustrates this point by describing that the supervisor realizes his/her school's condition, "I think she is very aware and has brought in a fresh perspective and ideas to get us where we need to go." P6 spoke to each school's distinctiveness

by observing that “supervisors can have different mentalities. They think they know the situation because they were a principal at one school, but different campuses have different needs.” P3 added, “Our approach might need to be different for our high school versus a high school down the street.” The overarching response from the surveys and interviews showed that supervisors play a critical role in communicating and interfacing with the district leadership; their realization of how schools are different, their physical presence in the schools with supporting the school leadership, creates improved conditions for academic achievement for the schools which serve the most fragile high school populations. Thus, the consideration of each school’s individuality was an expectation that principals reported they had for their supervisors.

Be present and communicate. Being present and communicating were two issues that continuously appeared in the data from campus administrators. The proximity to the lived experiences of leadership in a high poverty high school increases supervisor knowledge of the intricacies of each school campus. An example of this need to communicate was provided by P5:

They [the supervisors] think they know the situation because they were a principal at one school, but different campuses have needs. If the supervisor doesn’t really take time to hear you out, then they just assume it’s the same scenario. So, the time to understand the whole picture, I think, is important.

Without communicating and being present in the schools to gain an intricate level of understanding, supervisors are not capable of effectively realizing the specialized support for these school leaders in these challenging school environments.

Know our story. This expectation for awareness, according to the principals’ accounts, comes from being present at the schools, communicating, and collaborating about the diverse situations that leaders face at each respective school setting. With regard to communication,

principals said they expected their supervisors to know their campus story and their efforts to support student learning. This is summarized by QR8, who noted “Get a better understanding of who and what we are as a campus. Better know our needs, our gaps, and our attempts at improvement.” Most agreed that supervisors need a vibrant picture of the circumstances that affect high schools of poverty. With increasing the communication and collaboration between supervisor and principal, the research participants reported potential for improvement; without it, they noted potential for failure. To illustrate, P4 compared a high school in the school district to the challenges of the high poverty high school he has been leading:

So there’s a campus in our district, they take 2,200 AP [Advanced Placement] exams. So, they got 2,200 opportunities to get an AP for college credit, which will help them on [accountability for] CCMR [College, Career, Military Readiness]. That campus has a 100% on CCMR. Okay? They got 100 points. They’re a B school. Look at my campus! I only have 630 opportunities. Where is that fair?” We’re almost the same size as that campus. That’s the largest campus in the district, and I’m the second largest. How is that fair?

The lack of supervisor acknowledgement about each high school’s particular peculiarities with having its own story was reported by participants as challenging, such as respondent P4 stated in the aforementioned quote. QR24 noted that supervisors focus on “using the established curriculum, rather than adopting or utilizing best practices for underachieving campuses.” QR25 succinctly commented, “Time on the campus for the superior would be great so that dialogue can increase” wanting to have “better communications on the desired outcomes and resources to achieve goals.” Furthermore, P6 explained having the following opinion regarding supervisory involvement:

I think there's a fine line between micromanaging from the outside in, which is an executive type decision maker, which I do not support. If you're not here on this campus, you cannot know what all of the things are needed.

The participants' expectation for their supervisors to realize and cater to the specific inner workings of each high school was described by P4:

I think there's a disconnect with people who run the budgets, and people in leadership, teachers, and people [i.e., the principals] who are running the campuses. ... We should be having that conversation [about] how each school works, and how we each schedule kids and how they get their credits. If we are not, then it makes [leading the school] very frustrating.

Be in reality. Many principals believed their supervisors did not provide guidance according to "real-time issues" within their high schools' current contexts. QR50 lamented the following toward supervisors: "Never tell a current principal what you did in the past regarding academic achievement. The game has totally changed." Similarly, QR8 disclosed the following:

He thinks his experience from 20-plus years ago will meet our needs of a very nontraditional school setting without attempting to get in the ditch and understand the school from the get-go. [This leads to] very poor leadership and decision making from very poor data or understanding.

QR24 wrote about needing the supervisor to understand each principal's work circumstances. By not providing guidance according to current data about a campus, the principal supervisor communicates a false sense of reality from the principals' point of view.

QR24 offered explicit detail in the following statement:

I believe there is an understanding in theory, [but] not in practice. Due to the lack of visibility, supervisors do not have an in-depth comprehension of the challenges faced by every student and staff member on my campus. Therefore, solutions for my real-time issues are based on theory instead of practicality.

Thus, participants stressed the need to experience collaboration with their supervisors to increase communication and improve their connections with their supervisors. This collaboration would enable the supervisors to grasp the campus experience and the enormity of the situations that the schools' administrators face when managing high schools with high percentages of students from economic disadvantage. QR34 wrote, "I would say there is some understanding to 'the things we should be able' to do; however, the in-person experience [by the supervisor being on the campus] more often helps to bring a realistic perspective to the collaborative sessions." In other words, the supervisor cannot effectively help principals generate solutions for their schools' ongoing, complex needs without regularly visiting the campus and connecting with the people in the school to recognize what instruction and relationships actually take place among students, teachers, learning, and achievement. P5 passionately explained that supervisors "spend the time with us to try to help us and understand our situation so that they can go to the district and advocate for what are our needs based on our situation." Through that level of involvement and communication within the school's natural setting, the principals reported that supervisors can become equipped to support them with greater effectiveness in all aspects of high school leadership.

The participants' candidness about supervisors not taking the time to collaborate and comprehend the uniqueness of their schools' contexts was notable in the theme. Many participants commented about the negative consequences of supervisors not acknowledging their

high schools' specific challenges for attaining student achievement. All in all, the principals expected their supervisors to appreciate the differences between each high school through engaging in communication, being present on campus, and providing collaboration to construct a necessary bridge toward students' success. Principals expect their supervisors to realize that their high schools are not cookies from the same cutter. They require their supervisors to see the diversity contained in each high school and to offer intentional systems of effective and appropriate support.

Communicate and maintain clear expectations. Clarity of message was an issue referenced by all seven interviewees, which P1 explained with detail:

My expectations are, first of all, clear and consistent expectations for me. I want to know what I'm expected to do. What are you [principal supervisor] looking for in terms of performance from our campus? What would you consider a successful year? If that's clear and that's consistent, then I know what I have to do to get there.

This issue surfaced repeatedly with principals, who explained that they expected to know what exactly principal supervisors want. The questionnaire respondents mirrored the expectation for principal supervisors to promote clarity. QR15 wrote, "I need clear and frequent communication." QR20 responded having the need for "clear vision and goals." QR37 asked for "clear direction and communication, honesty, encouragement," and QR44 required "a clearly defined vision or list of goals."

Sustain clarity in message. P4 needed clarity in message and stated having experiences with supervisors who kept changing their requests: "Then they say, 'No, can you do [the project] this way?' So, we need clear expectations upfront." Additionally, supervisors were described as

not providing clarity in their messages about the “big picture” to principals which causes initiatives and plans to become confusing to principals. P2 expounded:

If there’s not a connection between his leadership and his directions to me, then I don’t know if I’m being directed because I have to be, or if I’m being directed because it’s their best advice for our best success. Does that make sense? I kind of feel like when it’s by cliché, when it’s just checking off a box, it makes buy-in difficult because, personally, for me, I spend more time wondering, *Well, what was the motivation there? What message is being conveyed?*

The lack of clarity of message by supervisors forces the principal to struggle to explain district decisions about which they are bewildered. Plus, campus leaders stated they tended not to understand the reasoning behind decision-making at the district level. In several interviews participants in this study stated that supervisors lacked clear expectations and did not cover things that they needed to know. P5 explained that supervisors need to help with “making sure we frame our initiative so that it includes the sense making piece. We have tried to do that, but sometimes it’s hard when we’re also having issues with the sense making.” P5 expressed worrying about “how are we going to message” initiatives that are not conveyed clearly for addressing the context of the specific high school. P4 illustrated the necessity of supervisors refraining from unclear communication with the belief that “we all need to be on the same page.” Through those communication methods and connectivity with the principals, the clear message becomes beneficial and the participants value it. P1 added that principals need to know from their supervisors, “what they see as a success at a campus, especially at a campus that has had struggles in the past.” The supervisor’s message was described as not always clear by P1. The

other participating principals reported clear messaging as an expectation that they had for their supervisors to improve.

Explain things clearly. In some instances, principal supervisors are very good about explaining positive, clear expectations and being effective in sharing clarity of purpose in communication, particularly when needing to forecast things that needed to happen weekly. P6 provided the following example of clear expectations from the principal supervisor who is:

Very thoughtful in reminding all of her principals, [such as] when we get close to a due date for anything. For the Campus Improvement Plans or the attendance plans, she will send those [reminders] in either a text message or an email, just to make sure that we're on track.

The principals' interviews revealed that expectations need to be clearly communicated "up front" and that supervisors should use exact and explicit instructions for the products they expect principals to produce. P3 shared, "I don't really deal with very much murkiness in regard to [expectations]. I think everybody's pretty direct, and I appreciate that."

In addition, principals reported that campus improvement plans must be submitted using a template, and after people turn in their plans, their supervisors tend to "change course and create more work." P4 recommended that supervisors "be thoughtful about what it is you want us to fill out so that we won't have to fill out once and then fill it out again." These principals believe the amount of time needed to revamp, rewrite, and re-explore a plan that was never explained clearly as an expectation from the beginning of the project was a waste of their valuable time. P5 illustrated:

I think that they [supervisors] have to stop being hasty with expectations ... hasty with being thoughtful about what they're expecting us to fill out. The intention is good, but then it becomes redundant. As a result of that, we [principals] all get frustrated.

Thus, the principals reported experiencing discouragement when lacking well-defined, clear expectations from their supervisors. P2 said, "There is not, for me at least, a clear delineation of 'This [project] is where you need work; this [initiative] is where you're doing great.'" Time is a very precious asset to the principals, "particularly when you lead a school of high economic disadvantage, where the students and teachers need more of you emotionally, and more of you to be invested in their circumstances." When the principal has to repeat actions because of supervisors' unclear expectations, the principal cannot effectively lead and support teachers, school staff, and students.

Provide models for expectations. Principals reported their supervisors' expectations being unclear during professional learning community meetings. The supervisors use a rating form to rank what the professional learning community experience looks like among the teachers and administrators at the high school. However, the principals reported that those expectations are not clearly delineated to them. Furthermore, the ideal professional learning community model or the perfect score on the professional learning community observation form is something their supervisors have not defined. P5 reported:

Give me true examples of professional learning communities. They [principal supervisors] come, observe, and give you feedback. They determine it was about a six out of a 10, but then I wonder [why was it six out of 10]? ... Give me specifics, like, I need examples. What would have made the PLC better? Because obviously, when we're

getting visited, we're trying to do our best, so if you say you needed more of this strategy, then okay. What does that strategy look like? Give me examples of how it looks.

This report of professional learning community expectations as not clearly defined is an example of a work product expected by the supervisors but not clearly explained by them. Clear guidance would involve showing the principals an exact model of what a grade of 10 out of 10 for a professional learning community (PLC) meeting would involve. P5 continued:

We need models for what is expected, such as: What makes a PLC a 10 or a 3? What are ways that they can be improved? What do those components look like? What would those [PLC specific] questions look like?

Some expectations the principals reported as being "foggy" involved their supervisors' expectations for "good classroom instruction." P6 communicated a need for supervisors to provide "examples when we're doing the instructional coaching cycles... actual examples." Principals shared that the definition of "good classroom instruction" is often unclear and indicated a desire to apprehend what behaviors encompass good questioning. P5 offered the following questions that supervisors need to answer:

Well, that was our next [instructional] step. If it's not good, then what could have been? Like based on your [classroom] observation, what would have been a clear next step or a better next step? Because again, we want to improve, but we're thinking at least as perplexed as to like what is the supervisor looking for?

The principals stated the importance of clear expectations when principal supervisors are setting up their model vision for what they want to see in high school classrooms. Participants in the study emphasized they expected supervisors not to be vague about their expectations. Supervisors need to be clear in setting expectations that enable principals to meet their goals, and

principals need those expectations to be “set out straight to begin with.” P4 noted the confusion principals must overcome involved the following: “Everybody wants the same data, the same information, but in different forms.” As a result of the expectations not being understood, the expectations not being clear, and the supervisors not setting the expectations and being consistent, principals reported wasting a lot of time dealing with repeating tasks and reports they already performed because the supervisor was not clear about what was wanted from the beginning. P7 discussed an example of unclear supervisor expectations for the campus improvement plan documents:

I would say streamlining the process is needed. For example, with our CIP [campus improvement plan], we turned that in on September 7th. Then, we got notification on Wednesday, that the information that we turned in was not enough, but we had been doing it that way as long as I’ve been an AP [assistant principal]. So, I think that we have to stop being hasty with expectations.

Avoid wavering expectations. The principals reported that supervisors expected one method of supervision in some cases but also changed those expectations due to external pressures. P1 discussed this experience:

For example, I’ve had situations where the supervisor says, “Oh now you got to go in there and clean that thing up, man. You got a lot of teachers who are not doing what they’re supposed to do ... you got to kind of be tough.” And I go in there and be tough, and then all of a sudden when the political heat starts coming in, they’re like, “Hold on a second now maybe you’re a little too tough.” [I respond] with “no, that’s not what you said. You said this is what you want to see.” So, it’s really important to understand [the expectation].

Those supervisor expectations wavered as described by participant P1.

Supervisors changed their expectations regarding the systems put in place for student transfers and waver in the implementation of those expectations when parents go to the central office to complain. For example, about needing to transfer a student with discipline problems to another school, P7 explained:

You hold kids accountable and you apply a consequence to their action, with the understanding that it's progressive discipline. Parents should not be allowed to go [transfer] from one school to the next, to the next, to the next. They should not.

The result is that the transfer receiving principal has no "leg to stand on" within a system that inconsistently represents how the school district conducts its business with parents. Again, P7 described the expectation wavering at central office regarding approval of student transfers:

They both got suspended, so the grandpa withdrew them and brought them here. I refused them and told them they have to go back to their home high school. "That is where you are enrolled." Grandpa went downtown, and they [district officials] gave him a contract to come to my high school. I don't think that should be allowed.

Consequently, the principals reported spending unnecessary time by navigating wavering expectations that come from different levels of district leadership.

The crux of the situation as these principals explained relates to supervisory expectations that are not laid out clearly and with examples what the products should show. P7 reiterated, "Just making sure that any information that we need to submit to [supervisors], whether it's through Google Docs or hard form, [is clearly explained]. Be thoughtful about what it is you want us to fill out." If the expectation is communicated, then it should not change or waver; when that happens, principals are forced to repeat situations, revisit projects, and lose time by

redoing reports that their supervisors had not mapped out clearly from the start. Thus, the principals in this study agree that clear expectations are essential to their leadership success.

Summary of Findings

The findings from this study resulted from the data derived from the questionnaire and interview participants sharing what needs, recommendations, and expectations they had for their principal supervisors. Additionally, I used the reflection journal that served as a tool for reducing bias within and enriching the findings from data analysis. As a collective, the secondary principals' responses represented the thoughts and experiences of high school principal serving a high poverty high school. The following themes formed the most prominent needs they desired their principal supervisors to meet: (a) grasp the gravity of needs in a high poverty high school; (b) know the critical need for high-quality, equitable staffing; (c) realize the magnitude of resources needed for student support; and (d) be an advocate. The participants' data led to the following themes about how principal supervisors can be effective leaders: (a) realize that principals are not superhumans and (b) be a trusted thought partner. Finally, the high school principals themes about their expectations for their principal supervisors were as follows: (a) understand the uniqueness of school contexts and (b) communicate and maintain clear expectations. The prevalent subthemes that supported the findings included understanding, prioritizing, providing feedback and reflection, being present, and communicating for positively impacting their working relationships and supporting student achievement.

The next chapter presents the theory that emerged from the data, a discussion of the findings in relation to the literature, and the conclusions and implications for practice. Furthermore, an overview of the limitations of this study appears. Finally, the subsequent chapter closes with recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The purpose of this study was to determine high school principals' needs for coaching and support from their district-level supervisors to attain academic achievement among economically disadvantaged secondary students. The following research questions guided the study:

1. What are the most prominent needs described by high school principals working in communities composed primarily of households of low socioeconomic status?
2. What do principals recommend their supervisors do to assist them in being effective leaders?
3. What are the principals' expectations for their principal supervisors?

From the three sources of information, I approached the data analysis by applying a constructivist view and discerned the principals' needs and recommendations. I utilized questionnaire data, interviews, and journal reflections to investigate the needs and issues surrounding high school principals who serve school communities comprised of high percentages of economically disadvantaged students. The participants in this study provided their individual interpretations of the principal and principal supervisor relationship and added insight to the overall body of research. These leaders discussed their own contexts about the supervisory supports they needed to improve their schools. The participants' explanations and recommendations led to discoveries about principals' perspectives on how their supervisors can meet their needs for guidance, advocacy, and leadership support.

The data represented a total of eight themes about how supervisors might meet the principals' needs for guidance, support, and academic improvements for students. I obtained

insight about the campus leaders' supervision needs and constructed meaning regarding ways they suggested how to best meet those needs (Merriam, 2009). The findings illustrated what high school principals in this study experienced during their daily leadership journeys when serving economically disadvantaged school communities. The themes illuminated the complexity of the campus leaders' prominent needs, recommendations for effective leadership supervision, and campus leaders' expectations for their supervisors.

From the data and themes, a theory of supervisory work emerged. In turn, the data allowed for the generation of recommendations that may be useful to principal supervisors seeking to more effectively support their principals. This chapter contains a discussion regarding the findings in relationship to the literature, conclusions, proposed theoretical model, limitations, and recommendations for practice and future research.

Summary of the Findings

The secondary principals in this study shared responses that represented their involvement and understanding of the leadership context of serving high poverty communities. The eight nascent themes aligned with and supported research to construct the basis of the theory which resulted from their contributions. The study participants' data were collected to understand the following research categories: (a) most prominent needs for their supervisors to support, (b) desires for principal supervisors to aid them with effective leadership, and (c) expectations for their supervisors to best assist them as campus leaders. Within the category of most prominent needs for principal supervisors to meet were, the first four themes: (a) grasp the gravity of needs in a high poverty high school, (b) know the critical need for high quality, equitable staffing, (c) realize the magnitude of resources needed for student support, and (d) be an advocate. The category of supervisors supporting effective principal leadership was supported

by the following two themes: (a) realize that principals are not superhumans and (b) be a trusted thought partner. Finally, for category of expectations for supervisors' assistance, the two final themes surfaced as follows: (a) understand the uniqueness of school contexts and (b) communicate and maintain clear expectations. An interesting, overarching issue encompassed by the eight themes reported in this study was the participants' belief that supervisor awareness and support included championing school district change.

Discussion of the Findings

The study's eight themes suggest the need for discussion according to five major conclusions to the study. This discussion of the findings is focused on the necessity for principal supervisors to promote school district change. The participants recommended changes to supervisors' practices for school improvement. Participants wanted their supervisors to have the leadership capacity to invoke critical adjustments to the systems that govern school leadership. The five major sections of the discussion relate to supervisor advocacy for principals leading high poverty schools, effective supervisory leadership supports, sustaining high quality staffing, efficiency in designing clear expectations, and supervisor differentiation of supports. Each is discussed in conjunction with the literature.

Supervisor Advocacy for Principals Leading High Poverty High Schools

The findings from this qualitative study support research results that have been reported by other studies in the literature, which is that principals who lead in low income schools have complex needs in many areas of leadership as they persevere to gain academic achievement for marginalized students (Gorski, 2017; Jensen, 2013; Knapp et al., 2010; Parrett & Budge, 2012). Researchers and participants in this study agreed that poverty affects schools and is an issue that needs to be constantly confronted (Booher-Jennings & DiPrete, 2009; Gorski & Swalwell, 2015;

Gorski, 2018; Jensen, 2009, 2013; Ng & Rury, 2006, 2009). Essentially, principal supervisors must mitigate the effects of poverty and its impact on academic growth at economically disadvantaged campuses by advocating at the district level for the demonstrated needs at these low-income schools (Gorski, 2017; Parrett & Budge, 2012). All agreed that principal supervisors must possess a keen understanding of the lived experiences of campus leaders and must advocate for improvements with district leaders. Importantly, principal supervisors must improve the support they offer to principals of high poverty high schools to effectively transform the principalship for campus leaders who face these challenging circumstances (Catano & Stronge, 2006; Daly, Liou, et al., 2014; Finnigan, 2012; Parrett & Budge, 2012).

The principals' data aligned with research whereby the supervisors need to advocate at the district level (Honig et al., 2010) by explaining the complexities that student poverty creates in schools (Gorski & Swalwell, 2015; Gorski, 2017; Lareau, 2011), by fighting for district equity in staffing allocations (Almy & Tooley, 2012; Booher-Jennings & DiPrete, 2009; Honig & Rainey, 2015; Papay & Kraft, 2016), by promoting principal leadership training to support with high-quality teacher recruitment and retention (Almy & Tooley, 2012; Johnson et al., 2012; Papay & Kraft, 2016; Peske & Haycock, 2006), and by seeking funding for the magnitude of resources needed for students enrolled in high poverty high schools (Gorski, 2008, 2017; Jensen, 2009; Ng & Rury, 2009; O'Hare, 2009). The overarching similarity with the participants' responses revealed that principals want their supervisors to possess a deep understanding of the lived experiences of leaders in these low-income high schools. This supports the literature to confirm the gravity of the number of economic, security, emotional, and instructional student needs that leaders in these learning institutions face due to serving students of poverty (Almy & Tooley, 2012; Gorski, 2017; Ikemoto et al., 2014; Kannapel et al., 2005; Parrett & Budge, 2012).

Another theme supported research regarding the context of how school districts unintentionally neglect staffing and resources at schools with marginalized student populations (Blankstein & Noguera, 2015; Booher-Jennings & DiPrete, 2009; Gorski, 2017; Johnson et al., 2012).

Participants confirmed previous researchers' claims that unless district and school leadership transform to respond to students' adverse conditions at these economically disadvantaged schools, the academic gaps will continue for disregarded youth (Almy & Tooley, 2012; Barone, 2006; Blankstein & Noguera, 2015; Gorski, 2017; Hahnel & Jackson, 2012; Kannapel et al., 2005; Reeves, 2014).

Sustain High-Quality Staffing

High-quality staff are critical for low-income student success, but they are the exception in staffing at high poverty high schools (Almy, & Tooley, 2012; Booher-Jennings & DiPrete, 2009; Peske & Haycock, 2006). All seven principals interviewed in this study agreed that high-quality teachers are critical for students' academic success. Participants' data aligned with the research in this area for two reasons. First, effective, high-quality teaching is a high-leverage component of student achievement in high schools serving students of low-socioeconomic status (Almy & Tooley, 2012; Barone, 2006; Hahnel & Jackson, 2012; Haycock, 2001; Jensen, 2009; Kannapel et al., 2005). Second, effective, high-quality teachers are not easily recruited or retained in high poverty high schools, and therefore, not readily available within these schools' communities (Booher-Jennings & DiPrete, 2009; Clotfelter et al., 2011; Gorski, 2017; Parrett & Budge, 2012; Peske & Haycock, 2006).

Furthermore, Klar and Brewer (2008) acknowledged that low income schools often have underqualified teachers who are not equipped to meet the instructional needs of their students as compared to their teacher colleagues who educate middle income and wealthy students. The

underqualified teacher has been described in the literature mainly to include those educators who are novice teachers, with two or fewer years of experience, and those teachers who possess out-of-field or alternative certification credentials (Johnson et al., 2012; Kraft et al., 2015; Peske & Haycock, 2006). The findings supported the literature as the participants asserted that principal supervisors must garner district resources to recruit effective teachers and to support the retention of teachers who enable marginalized students to make academic gains (Hahnel & Jackson, 2012; Johnson et al., 2012; Ladd, 2011).

Effective Supervisory Leadership Supports

Findings showed that over 50% of all participating principals between the interview and questionnaire groups had 5 or fewer years of campus leadership experience as a high school principal. As noted in Chapter 4, the data for which the majority of principals had fewer than 5 years of experience suggests that principal tenure at a high poverty school does not frequently span past 5 years for the participants in this study, which supports research in the field regarding high turnover rates for principals who lead in economically disadvantaged schools (Boyce & Bowers, 2016; Ikemoto et al., 2014).

This study also confirmed the research on the inordinate amounts of time that principals spend with multi-tasking and daily issues (Lavigne et al., 2016; O'Malley et al., 2015) as well as the challenges associated with long working hours and overloaded work schedules for principals who serve high poverty student populations (Ikemoto et al., 2014; National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015). Principals' data support the need to move away from central office compliance monitoring by supervisors and to focus on principal capacity building to prioritize high leverage strategies to have achievement with large percentages of economically

disadvantaged, thus affecting principal turnover rates (Bayar, 2016; Boyce & Bowers, 2016; Ikemoto et al., 2014).

The participants' data confirmed recent research of Honig and Rainey (2014) showing a need for creating new ways for supervisors to support campus leaders. These findings support the literature where respondents want partnership and collaboration with their principal supervisors, and acknowledge that the existing principal supervision models have not been intended to work as a partnership or in a collaborative nature (Corcoran et al., 2013; Daly, Finnigan, et al., 2014; Honig & Rainey, 2015; Jacob et al., 2015). In conclusion, supervisory leadership designs and practices must be redesigned so principal supervisors can convert their focus away from management of compliance and toward building trusting partnerships focused on principals' growth as leaders (Barnes et al., 2017; Hall et al., 2016; Honig & Rainey, 2014).

The findings aligned with research in which findings related to the unrealistic expectations for principals to sustain the hours and time required to serve the plethora of neediness that arises from students who experience poverty while enrolled at the high school campus (Ikemoto et al., 2014). As documented in the Lavigne et al. (2016) and Gillborn and Youdell studies (2000), the stress associated with providing the time needed to meet the demands and varied responsibilities placed upon school principals is valid. These researchers showed that campus principals regularly work well over 40 hours weekly and balance numerous, diverse tasks.

The participating principals agreed that their supervisors need to help them prioritize and manage the overwhelming, unrealistic, and numerous demands on their time. Those demands include the required tasks and expectations issued from district-level offices and competing campus, parent, and community interests. Administrators in low income high schools have much

to overcome in these situations due to the fragile nature of poverty and the academic struggles that plague marginalized students who lack resources (Blankstein & Noguera, 2015; Gorski, 2017; Ikemoto et al., 2014; Jensen, 2013). Principal supervisors are positioned to create new ways for their campus principals to overcome the external obstacles of leadership that clutter and complicate their ability to improve teaching and learning at their respective schools.

High school principals in this study reported that their school district leaders have *superhuman* expectations of them that complicate their management of their high schools. The participants expressed their frustrations with juggling multiple, diverse demands and competing interests issued from central office leaders while trying to improve students' academic achievement levels. In the midst of a demanding, fast-paced environment, focusing on instruction remained a challenge for the participants who expressed being expected to *walk on water and leap tall buildings with a single bound*.

In general, the principal respondents stated they work as shrewdly and diligently as possible. However, they claimed that the hardships for teaching, learning, and student achievement are vast in their schools. The principals reported that principal supervisors presume they will address all facets of school and community demands at all times, but they noted the reality of classroom coaching and instructional improvement suffering when they must handle the principal supervisors' expectations to complete competing projects and tasks. The school leaders in this research reported that the non-instructional workload has created insurmountable challenges for them and left them less well-equipped to coach teachers toward ensuring the academic improvement of their students. These circumstances, as reported in the data, align with previous research findings (Gorski, 2017; Honig, 2013a; Lavigne et al., 2016; O'Malley et al., 2015; Parrett & Budge, 2012).

The data showed the need principals have for their supervisors to help them, as leaders, manage the high volume of expectations and prioritize management and organizational requisites they must address in the high poverty high school. The principal position requires an amazing amount of multi-tasking to manage all of the issues that arise throughout the day (Bayar, 2016; O'Malley et al., 2015). School leaders who persist, given the challenges to improve below average performing low income schools, work limitless hours to deal with the ongoing issues that occur in this educational context (Ikemoto et al., 2014; Lavigne et al., 2016). Thus, the participants' replies aligned with Corcoran et al. (2013), in which principals wanted their principal supervisors to engage with them to navigate leadership effectiveness hurdles. Principals, in this study, said they want to be instructional leaders, not school project managers.

Efficiency in Designing Clear Expectations

In this particular study, high school principals who lead low income schools reported that they expect assistance in two major areas from their principal supervisors to effectively support them in their leadership. First, principal supervisors manage too many schools at the same time (Honig, 2012). They cannot address contextual issues comprehensively if their ratios of schools with high needs are too many for the purpose of ensuring academic achievement among students of economic disadvantage. Principals, in this study, need principal supervisors to avoid the tendency to generalize and treat all school situations and school leadership as literally the same. Participants were resolute that each school leadership situation is unique, serving different students and stakeholders. They also reiterated that their school communities possess distinctive qualities composed of people, processes, challenges, and strengths. This finding was congruent to the research in which school leaders are charged to expend their leadership inventories in a certain style even though what is effective in one situation may not be effective in another setting

(Bolman & Gallos, 2010; Hallinger, 2003; Marzano et al., 2005; Paletta, Alivernini, & Manganelli, 2017). Previous research did not fully acknowledge situational aspects of leadership and acknowledgements of environmental context by principal supervisors that was found in this grounded theory study. This study's respondents made their preferences for principal supervisors to understand that *schools are not cut from the same cookie-cutter* and to respond to each unique situation accordingly.

Second, the principal participants revealed concerns about their supervisors' clarity on what they wanted campus principals to produce. Participants shared that, oftentimes, they would not get clear communication regarding the outcome expectations they were issued, resulting in confusion about implementation of processes at the campus level. Overall, this section of the study revealed that participants expect to receive clear direction and clear modeling of expectations as critical to operational and instructional leadership efficiency. Analysis presents questions regarding ways to protect the principals' time and the supervisors' time to design calendars for due dates and compliance, as well as manage clear expectations regarding artifacts and processes that are collected by central office leaders.

The participating principals' data showed alignment with others' findings regarding a disconnection between the expectations that are communicated to principals and the process of principal supervision and regarding chronically inconsistent communication coming from principal supervisors about expectations for job performance (Derrington & Sanders, 2011; Fuller & Hollingsworth, 2013; Honig, 2012; Jacob et al., 2015). The current findings also support literature in which principal supervisors' clear communication of expectations enables the creation of professional relationships in which reflective practice can occur with principals (Corcoran et al., 2013; Honig, 2012; Rainey & Honig, 2015). For campus leaders to have

effective leadership results, principal supervisors must demonstrate what they expect and model those components in order to build capacity in the principals they serve (Honig, 2012; Honig et al., 2017; Honig & Rainey, 2014).

The current themes support others' findings that inconsistent communication from principal supervisors and the central office leadership in what they require from principals reduces principals' effectiveness (Derrington & Sanders, 2011; Fuller & Hollingsworth, 2013; Honig, 2012; Jacob et al., 2015). Participant principals shared their concerns regarding the central office leaders' lack of clarity with expectations about campus improvement plans, response to intervention programs, and the procedures of professional learning communities (PLC). For example, according to participants in this study, streamlining and clearly articulating the process of campus improvement planning (CIP) is needed; data in this research showed principals' experiences had caused multiple rewrites of plans due to lack of central office and supervisor clarity. These exercises in redundancy result from unclear supervisor expectations, created inefficiency, and waste school leaders' time. Principals in this study repeatedly remarked that there was an inadequacy of examples and models showing specific strategies that exemplify best practice applications in the daily work of instructional leadership for teaching and learning.

This study's high school principals emphasized improving the lines of communication between principal supervisors and their campus leaders. By having open dialogue regarding the best practices for operating PLCs and by studying performance data, principal supervisors can generate improved communication yielding clear expectations and positive effects. Clarity can enable principal supervisors to gain a deeper understanding of the low-income school's context (Johnson et al., 2012; Paletta et al., 2017; Straw et al., 2013; Vander Ark & Ryerse, 2017).

Supervisor Differentiation of Supports

One theme from this study was not encountered widely in professional literature: Principals strongly recommended that principal supervisors differentiate support as commensurate to the unique needs at each learning institution. Although school context has been studied (Johnson et al., 2012; Leithwood, Harris, & Strauss, 2010; Paletta et al., 2017), analysis presents questions regarding the nature of school context and how it should be deliberated by principal supervisors. Leithwood (2005) asserted that understanding context does increase superintendents' leadership success by matching the style and direction applied to various needs in schools. Hallinger (2003) acknowledged the importance of context for school leadership and admitted there have not been conclusive findings on solving the challenges of varying contexts surrounding school leadership. Data from this study illustrated an emphasis where no school situation, or context, is the same, so school administrators explained that their supervisors need to acknowledge that unique circumstances exist among schools and respond accordingly.

As reported in this study, principals emphasized that principal supervisors must individualize school leadership contexts because broad leadership directives are regarded by principals as ineffective. The respondents argued that it was important for supervisors to know each campus' unique story and their distinct efforts to support student learning. Generalizing school situations was reported as problematic by study participants because schools are not like *the same cookies from cookie-cutters*. Essentially, many principals in this study reasoned that principal supervisors need to be involved actively with them to know the narratives and context found in each school and to know how it meet each school's unique needs. The activity of reflective exchange between principal supervisors and principals can be used to demonstrate the differences in leadership contexts and circumstances among high schools (Mader, 2016).

Principal supervisors must respond to the uniqueness of contexts for the principals and schools they oversee. Each context is different and requires principal supervisors to evaluate the distinctiveness of each school circumstance. Supervisor generalizations regarding context do not work; these lead to inefficiency because schools are as inimitable as the people they serve and the communities in which they operate. Particularly, the use of data specific to each school and community will aid supervisors in constructing a genuine and accurate view of the circumstances and distinctive characteristics. Analysis brings questions to light. How do principal supervisors make sense of the school's needs and the leaders who run these unique environments? Principals, in this study, relayed that supervisors should not expect the same situations as when they themselves served as principals.

As reported in this research, supervisors who make attempts to apply problem-solving strategies from their previous leadership experiences, do not respond to the unique problems campus leaders encounter in the schools they serve. Moreover, principals emphasized that each school has different staffing needs, distinctive student needs, various facility challenges, specific teacher training needs, as well as community characteristics that are inimitable. Thus, the tendency to apply standardized solutions to varying school circumstances cannot be effective due to lack of applicability to the lived contexts and climates found within each school's organizational learning community.

A Grounded Model of Supervisory Effectiveness

A grounded theory is built around situations and people who experience circumstances within the context of a study (Charmaz, 2014). Based on the findings, the conclusion to this study is the grounded theory presented here. This theory operates according to the expressed needs of high school principal participants as associated with their supervisors' support.

Specifically, this theory is based upon the understanding of leadership in economically disadvantaged high schools and the associated needs of practitioners who serve as principals in these schools and school districts. I discuss the components of the constructed grounded theory that emerged from the findings based on the presentation of the model in Figure 1.

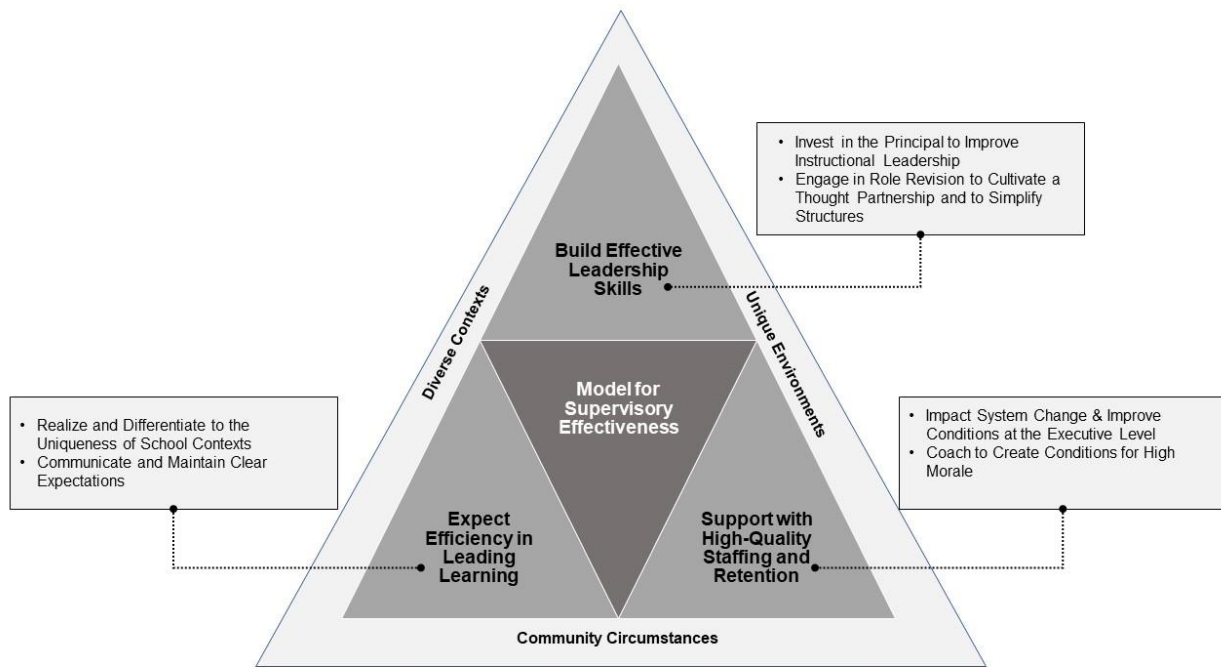


Figure 1. The grounded model of principal supervisor effectiveness.

Supervisory Effectiveness

The principals who responded in this study overwhelmingly wanted their supervisors to be with them in the work and comprehend the level of complexity they face on all fronts when leading to change the academic trajectory for economically disadvantaged students. Essentially, the principals shared what they believe represents an overarching model of effectiveness in principal supervision. This analysis raises questions regarding supervisor resilience to know the *unique environments* of campus leadership with an in-depth understanding of what happens in the various schools each principal and principal supervisor serves. By being involved at a high

level of executive status (Honig et al., 2010), supervisors can more clearly articulate and campaign for the intricate needs these schools have within their *community circumstances*. Respectively, district leaders are challenged to consider their schools' *diverse contexts* and to provide appropriate solutions for underperforming, underprivileged students as they persist to succeed in the high school setting (Johnson et al., 2012; Paletta et al., 2017). Through increased supervisor understanding, this study suggests supervisor advocacy to identify district systemic practices that cause undo harm to schools serving high percentages of students living in poverty in the aforementioned domains of reality.

Ultimately, supervisor school advocacy, requested from principals in this research, has the perceived potential to combat the unintended neglect of district leaders to pay attention to the unique contexts and inequities that exist for schools of a low income nature. This data reveals principals' perspectives that supervisors must fight for district understanding to impact system change with the depth and resilience warranted for improving conditions for students in predominantly economically disadvantaged school communities. Still, redesigning principal supervision to support principals' growth as instructional leaders is possible in diverse types of school systems, but such work takes time, communication and people with the right orientation to the work (Rainey & Honig, 2015).

Districts need to recognize that the adverse conditions facing students and staff in high poverty high schools call for redesigning district supervisor supports for campus leaders (Honig & Rainey, 2019; James-Ward & Potter, 2011). The premise is for supervisors to ensure district systems are functioning and favorable for the highest need schools (Blankstein & Noguera, 2015; Honig et al., 2010). Those systems should be designed to build effective leadership skills in campus administrators (Fullan & Edwards, 2017; Hallinger, 2003; Marzano & Waters, 2009), to

support high-quality staffing and retention in hard-to-staff schools (Hahnel & Jackson, 2012; Hughes et al., 2015; Johnson et al., 2012), and to expect efficiency in leading learning while various district teams support these school environments (Honig, 2013b; Honig et al., 2010; Rainey & Honig, 2015).

Thus, this theory supports redesigning how principal supervision functions (Hall et al., 2016; Honig & Rainey, 2019; Rainey & Honig, 2015). If high school principals of high need schools are to receive adequate district and supervisor support for ensuring academic achievement, then low income high schools will demonstrate student success for the disadvantaged students who need educational advancement to alleviate the effects of poverty. Ultimately, this model will transform district supervisory practices to champion academic achievement for students who are marginalized due to their economic conditions. The constructed redesign is comprised of a complex set of tenets for principal supervisors as seen in Figure 1.

Build Effective Leadership Skills in Principals

Principal supervisors' intentional investments in their principals' development improve instructional leadership (Honig et al., 2017; Knapp et al., 2010). Principals' instructional leadership has influence regarding the overall success of students (Jacob et al., 2015; Kannapel et al., 2005; Marzano et al., 2005). Supervisors can support their principals by designing professional community and dialogue for thought partnerships (Honig et al., 2010; Honig & Rainey, 2014). The analysis from this study proposes trusting partnerships, that are supportive and mutually beneficial, can create the conditions for supervisors to mentor and develop instructional leadership capacity in principals.

Principals in this study recommended for their supervisors to assist their leadership effectiveness by recognizing two major components of their leadership journey in their respective roles as high school administrators who serve large numbers of economically disadvantaged youth. First, participants requested for principal supervisors to recognize their efforts to manage the extreme quantity of central office demands placed upon them, leaving them lacking in their pursuit of instructional leadership. Second, the principals asked for principal supervisors to help them improve as leaders by listening to them and engaging in collaboration and dialogue through trusting, collegially focused conversations.

Invest in the principal to improve instructional leadership. Kirtman and Fullan (2016) asserted that leaders must move beyond a culture of compliance; this research illustrated that a major leadership competency needed for school leadership success was for leaders to prevent compliance regulations from impeding the ability to generate student achievement results. Principal supervisors' utilization of this approach at the central office level would result in the strategic simplification of approaches to compliance work; the demands could be parceled into segments where principals can prioritize and manage (Daly, Liou, et al., 2014; Honig, 2012). For example, rather than enforcing a countless number of distractions issued by disconnected silos of central office leaders (Honig, 2013b; Honig & Rainey, 2015), principal supervisors could organize a system where central office leaders schedule their communication in a tactical manner. The principal supervisor's assistance can enable principals to work with some efficiency to meet the needs of all divisions of a school district; this could happen through the supervisor's intentional investment of time to help the school leader and the communication emphasis for transforming central office culture (Derrington & Sanders, 2011; Honig & Rainey, 2014).

Bambrick-Santoyo (2018), who studied successful principals, accentuated time as a high-leverage component of leadership effectiveness and the “single greatest determinant” of success (p. 268). Through implementing a monitored, ordered approach, principal supervisors can streamline systems to combat the myriad requirements that fly in the face of principals. The controlled design would be a systemic, weekly communication where all central office departments would unify their requests, deadlines, upcoming information, and calendar events. Thus, the principal’s time can be better utilized on high yield levers for teacher and student improvement.

Other miscellaneous demands that are directed at the school principals would go through a filtering process developed by the principal supervisor in the effort to avoid fragmented and disjointed requests from separate silos in central office. This approach would allow for the district operations to engage in respect for principals’ time management strategies. Therefore, supervisors would mitigate the production of overbearing, disconnected directives toward school leaders and execute strategically designed interventions, enabling principals to address a group of streamlined requests in some ranked, segmented fashion.

This change toward filtering demands at the principal supervisor level would yield reasonable working conditions for school leaders. The main impact for this transformation would be principals gaining time to concentrate on classroom instruction and improvement, which should be the main focus of their work. However, instructional leadership tends to be neglected because of overly burdensome deadlines and compliance issues (Daly, Lieu, et al., 2014; Ikemoto et al., 2014). By transforming the organization of the work assigned to campus leaders, principal supervisors can protect their principals’ abilities to focus on coaching for classroom instruction, teacher development, and academic achievement gains among students who struggle

due to their economic circumstances. In other words, this concentrated focus between supervisor and principal would allow principals to keep to the main thing of their focus in education: instructional leadership and student achievement (Fullan & Edwards, 2017).

In sum, principal supervisors must use their locus of influence to contribute to district efficiency and the redesign of the district's compliance demands at the school level. Although the principal's role is complex and campus leaders fulfill responsibilities that overlap among several layers of stakeholders (Ikemoto et al., 2014; Knapp et al., 2010), the school administrator would benefit from restructured expectation communications by their districts to improve how they manage strains on their time. Through principal supervisory solutions, school leaders would gain a logical approach to respond to the vast requirements of district departments.

Principal supervisors need to engage in role revision to cultivate a thought-partnership collaboration and simplify structures. The trusted thought partner was reported by the interviewed principals as a crucial component of leadership growth; the literature confirms this type of collaboration as essential to leadership success in this environment (Honig, 2012; Mader, 2016; Knapp et al., 2010). According to previous findings, the principal supervision structure was not initially intended to be a collaborative practice with principals (Corcoran et al., 2013; Daly, Finnigan, et al., 2014; Honig & Rainey, 2014; Jacob et al., 2015). Nevertheless, the principal participants in this study, expressed a need for role revision. They valued their principal supervisor's feedback and reflective questioning to help them be solution-focused.

The responding principals of low-income schools expressed wanting to work with a principal supervisor as a trusted partner in the work of aiding students. The participants described the best thought partners as supervisors who would be introspective toward

brainstorming and generating leadership ideas. Furthermore, campus administrators emphasized the best partnerships develop when supervisors take time to grasp these principals' unique challenges, to "listen with an empathetic ear," and to use guiding questions to challenge thinking. The findings support the literature in which principal supervisors need to shift from enforcing compliance and move toward genuine engagement with principals to revise roles, build trust, and warrant leadership growth for the school principal (Barnes et al., 2017; Hall et al., 2016; Honig, 2012; Knapp et al., 2010).

Principal supervisors can provide their principals with understanding of how to lead and learn continuously (Honig & Rainey, 2014; Mader, 2016). Such change drivers as capacity building and teamwork align with strategies for supervisor coaching and partnership (Fullan & Edwards, 2017; Jacob et al., 2015; James-Ward & Potter, 2011). By producing collaborative conditions for principals to experience feedback and support, school districts may retain high-quality principals more often (Honig, 2012; Honig & Rainey, 2014; Ikemoto et al., 2014; James-Ward & Potter, 2011; O'Malley et al., 2015).

Principals, in this research, needed their principal supervisors to be thought-oriented enthusiasts and to listen and help them develop their own conclusions by coaching the principals to find answers within data and experiences. A thought partnership allows for trusted dialogue where the principal can simplify structures and think through complex leadership issues. Through partnership, the principal is allowed time and opportunities to converse with an expert resource, the principal supervisor, to then make effective and bold decisions or to make effective and conservative decisions, based upon contextual realities. The supervisor can be that sounding board, that listening ear, that person available to offer questions and reflections, so that the principal can grow and gain confidence in decision making. The principal supervisor must serve

as a trusted thought partner to help the principal reflect and make informed decisions on what task or situation needs full attention.

Foundational to effective leadership, principal supervisors help principals prioritize their many roles and responsibilities as well as use systems for making those things happen (Vander Ark & Ryerse, 2017). Additionally, Thessin (2019) showed this supervisor assistance works well between principal supervisors and principals when each person contributes to the progress of a productive partnership while focusing on sharing the work. Moreover, trust is an essential need for leaders who seek to have satisfaction with their organizations, and trust must be present for effective collaboration to occur (Kouzes & Posner, 2012).

To improve principals' abilities to prioritize and to reflect, principal supervisors should be equipped to help their principal leaders understand the Bolman and Deal's (1991, 2017) four-frame structure that offers a consistent approach for discourse and a constant, reliable way for both principal supervisors and principals to find common ground regarding the structural, political, human resource, and symbolic frames operating within complex organizations. Bolman and Deal (1991, 2017) suggested operating according to the four organizational perspectives or frames known as structural, human resource, political, and symbolic. Each frame consists of concepts and structures that help make sense of how individuals and organizations function with thinking and working. The individual frames have limitations and strengths, but all have been validated in both research and leadership practice (Bolman & Deal, 2017). With this organizational leadership framework, principal supervisors could be reflective on the strategic application of frames to focus on what types of issues warrant deep conversations, prioritization, and solutions (Thessin, 2019). Through the four-frame construct in which the thought partner concept would be applied, principals would be able to reframe and restructure their thinking in

collaboration with their principal supervisors to create the joint work of partnership, dialogue, and reflection. Through “reframing” academic leadership circumstances, campus administrators gain opportunities to effectively navigate solving problems and to solve them proactively and pragmatically (Bolman & Gallos, 2010). As a consequence, changes to the relationship would promote principal success opportunities.

Through a trusted thought partnership, the principal supervisor engages by listening to the principal’s needs and concerns. Simultaneously, the supervisor develops the principal’s leadership decision-making abilities by using trustworthy dialogue and reflective analysis of the frames in which leadership concerns or campus challenges may fall. Through the structure of each frame, principal supervisors can guide principals to build instructional decision-making capacity and create conditions to be confident in their own thinking and decision-making.

Kouzes and Posner (2012) noted that reflective actions and the ability to “take stock” of current situations enable leaders to evaluate actions as working or not working to promote change for the benefit the overall organization. Ultimately, the thought partnership may result in campus administrators growing into solution-oriented, decision-makers over time. Fullan and Edwards (2017) agreed that a key influence a leader could make to an organization was to build the capacity in others.

This study’s participants acknowledged that by getting support to prioritize and manage the workload, as well as using open dialogue, their principal supervisors can realize the intricacies involved in being an effective principal leader in high poverty high school and offer corresponding help. Principal supervisors hold in a unique, pivotal position of leadership in the school district (Corcoran et al., 2013; Honig & Rainey, 2019). Their influence and partnership

with principals in high poverty schools is vital to the success of those campus administrators and the communities they serve (James-Ward & Potter, 2011; Thessin, 2019).

Support with High-Quality Staffing and Retention

Essentially, equitable, and high-quality staffing is necessary in high schools that serve low-income students (Schmid, 2018). Otherwise, the problem of high turnover among principals of high schools containing high concentrations of students of economic disadvantage is likely to continue (Bayar, 2016; Boyce & Bowers, 2016). Principal supervisors need to be empowered to perform the two important functions for their principals; they must fight for their campus leaders who need exemplary staff, and they must coach school administrators for creating positive school climates which retain effective teachers in economically disadvantaged schools.

Principal supervisors can impact system change and improve district conditions at the executive level to fulfill the critical need for equitable, high-quality staffing. District and campus staffing equity does not systemically exist in many school districts, and that lack of equity means campus leaders need higher volume staffing support to best prepare students of poverty for academic achievement (Burkhauser et al., 2012; Jennings & Sohn, 2014; Jensen, 2013; Papay & Kraft, 2016). It is well documented that inequitable staffing creates academic inequity and closing of the achievement challenges in high poverty schools (Blankstein & Noguera, 2015; Gorski, 2017; Papay & Kraft, 2016). Teacher recruitment is complex, and high levels of teacher turnover occur in disadvantaged schools, resulting in leaders being forced to employ educators with little or no experience (Jacob et al., 2015; Jensen, 2013; Peske & Haycock, 2006). The participating principals reported that staffing equity does not exist in their respective school districts. Moreover, this study's data showed that staffing allocations that are determined in the districts' central offices fail to accurately predict high school level staffing

needs. This lack of accuracy leads to principals having an inability to hire the right quality and quantity of teachers before the first day of school (Papay & Kraft, 2016).

In actuality, high poverty schools receive fewer resources from district officials with regard to staffing allocations (Almy & Tooley, 2012; Booher-Jennings & DiPrete, 2009; Parrett & Budge, 2012; Peske & Haycock, 2006). The data suggested that district officials do not allocate hiring resources until weeks after the school year began. The principals in this study reported scrambling with overcrowded classes, limited class sections to offer, and no staffing relief for the entire first 4 to 6 weeks of any school year. The consequences for late-hiring circumstances lead to strains on existing faculty to support substitute teachers and the students they serve, and the lack of qualified teachers causes hiring to continue weeks into the school year (Papay & Kraft, 2016).

Principal supervisors can be partners in strategic planning for staffing needs which would ensure their commitment regarding how to explain their schools' needs. Thus, they can uphold principals and advocate at the highest district levels for ensuring proper timing with hiring teachers, discussing budgetary impact, and planning for classroom ratios that ensure high-quality teachers serve students in economically disadvantaged high schools. When districts do not provide advanced management for their enrollment projections, accounting for freshmen repeaters, or credit failure rates, or foregone projections, they do not appropriately allocate staffing needs within schools. This lack of prediction and planning significantly impacts the culture and climate of the learning environment, as well as teacher morale, because students of high poverty need their high schools to offer commensurate support for their academic performance to be successful.

With teacher staffing and recruitment, principal supervisors must be able to explain the schools' needs and advocate at the highest district levels for change; they must transform district conditions for the timing, budgetary impact, and class-size ratios to ensure high-quality teachers are staffed in economically disadvantaged high schools. This cycle of staffing instability cannot be transformed without advocacy provided at the executive level by the principal supervisor.

In order to advocate for improving district structures that include providing high-quality teachers equitably, Honig (2012) suggested that principal supervisors must serve in the superintendent's cabinet or executive team. With direct proximity to the highest level of district decision makers, which include superintendents, chief financial officers, and chief human capital resource officers, the principal supervisor can campaign for their schools' needs and explain the positive and negative effects of district-level decisions regarding the timely hiring of teachers. Principal supervisors, if assigned to the executive cabinet, can effectively express the school-wide ramifications associated with hiring teachers after the start of the school year and with not hiring enough teachers to equitably serve the specific needs of low income students. Also, principal supervisors can advocate for their schools' staffing allocations, budgets, and class size ratios. With access to the superintendent's cabinet of influence-makers, principal supervisors can illuminate the issues affecting high-poverty high schools and provide recommendations for district transformation.

Principal supervisors should coach principals to create conditions for high morale in economically disadvantaged schools. The pervasive sentiment shared from the campus leaders in this study was that they are at a crisis level with attracting and retaining high-quality teachers. Principal supervisors must coach their principals to create conditions in their schools for improving the culture and the climate to improve teacher retention (Barnes et al., 2017; James-

Ward & Potter, 2011). “Principals grow when they have access to on-the-job supports, such as mentoring that takes a teaching-and-learning approach ... the central office and principal supervisors specifically can be important providers of such support” (Honig & Rainey, 2019, p. 12).

Redesigning the supervisor and principal relationship to develop quality recognition systems in schools where teachers have value, where they are honored, and where they have opportunities to be instructional leaders (Johnson et al., 2012) could improve culture in the high needs school environment. Supervisors could set the tone for their principals to design traditions to notice commitment where teachers are validated for their beliefs to excel with economically disadvantaged students (Hall et al., 2016). Likewise, systems could be established where leaders are equity-informed, and teachers’ and students’ work and progress are both acknowledged and honored by campus leaders (Gorski, 2017; Gorski & Swalwell, 2015). Moreover, progress milestones need to be in place so that teachers can see student growth and undergo changed belief systems due to student growth (Jensen, 2009). These changes in beliefs then influence teachers’ willingness and motivation to stay on the job and to persevere as high-quality teachers serving low-income schools (Johnson et al., 2012).

As well, this study’s findings confirmed that principals believe that emotional and instructional issues plague economically disadvantaged students (Jensen, 2009, 2013; Lareau, 2011) whose teachers bear much responsibility for providing support and resources to the students (Gorski, 2017). Interestingly, Caringi et al. (2015) unveiled a condition of secondary traumatic stress (STS) that educators experience when teaching impoverished youth who undergo traumas that they share with teachers at school. STS symptoms are similar to posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and can affect teachers’ professional practice as well as

their happiness and health adversely (Caringi et al., 2015). The schools serving marginalized student populations produce revolving doors of teachers, resulting in inconsistent longevity and reducing educational stability among students in these economically disadvantaged school communities (Gorski, 2008, 2017; Jensen, 2009; Ng & Rury, 2009; O'Hare, 2009). For this reason, the principals in this study emphasized needing their supervisors to ensure they have the authority and resources to recruit and retain high-quality teachers for serving the low-income students in their schools. However, principals need resources to help their teachers cope with the traumas and stresses they experience as part of serving these youth (Caringi et al., 2015; Finnigan, 2012).

Supervisory leadership development, coaching and guidance are needed to help principals attract, support, and retain the highly effective teachers, who typically do not persist within economically disadvantaged schools. Honig and Rainey (2014) suggested that principal coaching conversations with principal supervisors are designed for leadership growth. Caringi et al. (2015) and Johnson et al. (2012) suggested that supervisors can regularly engage in mentorship with principals to design cultural conditions at schools where teachers experience the following: (a) recognition for navigating the difficulties of the servant leadership they provide to marginalized students, (b) having continuous training to be trauma-informed and responsive to themselves and others, and (c) relationships within peer professional learning communities. Plus, the supervisor must be deliberate to engage in meaningful coaching with his/her principal for capacity-building (Honig & Rainey, 2014; Honig et al., 2017; Rainey & Honig, 2015). The coaching focused supervisor provides the time to counsel and guide the campus leader to certify the principal and principal supervisor have a mutually supportive relationship and their work is dedicated to a building community that celebrates the diligent work of the faculty as believers in

the potential achievement of economically struggling students. This purposeful design will develop campus administrators to improve conditions for teachers and students in their difficult educational circumstances.

In sum, sustaining the support for high-quality staffing and retention is critical for the model of supervisory effectiveness. Principal supervisors must be assigned to the executive level of leadership in a school district to adequately enlighten the most influential leaders and campaign for equity in schools. It is also essential for principals to be the beneficiaries of district-level advocacy by elevating the principal supervisor's status to work alongside the executive leadership cabinet and superintendent. Furthermore, by transforming the role of the supervisor into a coaching for high teacher morale, this will enable the campus administrator to set the stage for acknowledging the serious and meaningful contributions of effective teachers; consequently, these teachers will continue their valued work in educating students in low income schools. Making adjustments that create climates of collaboration may facilitate district-level changes that positively affect high school principals, their staffs, and their marginalized students.

Expect Efficiency in Leading Learning

This study divulged principals' opinions that supervisors do not relate their leadership strategies to help school principals find solutions within the distinctive context of each school situation; in turn, this dilemma creates missteps for leadership efficiency because supervisory suggestions are not applicable across school environments. Principal supervisors must be involved in the weekly leadership work with the principals to comprehensively understand and experience the challenges in such educational settings (Knapp et al., 2010). Moreover, supervisors must ensure that they themselves and central office staff provide clear, communicated expectations for campus leaders (Derrington & Sanders, 2011; Honig & Rainey,

2014; Lavigne et al., 2016). Consequently, principals lack academic effectiveness when supervisor supports vary greatly or lead to contradictions in expectations and roles (Ikemoto et al., 2014). Supervisors need to ensure that outcomes and parameters are defined for district communication with principals where central office staff navigate their communication and expectations clearly; through the guidance of the supervisor, outcomes can be vetted for clear expectations to support school leaders in the field.

Principal supervisors should realize and differentiate to the uniqueness of school contexts. Reports from this study's participating principals uncovered concerns toward principal supervisors who generalize their leadership supervision regardless of unique school contexts. Of particular note, participants stated that principal supervisors are out of touch with the climates found in today's high poverty high schools. Hallinger (2003) discussed context as the environment, opportunities, and limitations that leaders need to comprehend in order to lead in the given situation. The participants' data supported the notion that supervisors are not effective when they generalize between settings and contexts to apply a generic supervisory strategy across all leaders and schools.

In other research, Leithwood (2005) suggested a superintendent's leadership success is contingent upon the application of leadership style and directives matching the unique context of the schools. Leithwood et al. (2010) acknowledged turnaround schools possess unique contexts for leadership. Interestingly, Hallinger (2003) concluded there is not yet any theory developed regarding adapting supervision to school context. Nonetheless, there is not an abundance of previous studies surrounding principal supervisors' approach to adjust to school and school leaders' context. Thus, research alignment is lacking with this study's data regarding the need for

principal supervisors to differentiate their approaches based upon the specific needs and context of each school leadership dynamic and situation.

Typically, principal supervisors have monitored the results and work of the campus principal, but not engaged in knowing their principals work in a deep, meaningful way (Honig et al., 2010; Mader, 2016). Consequently, Corcoran et al. (2013) noted that the principal supervisors' workload challenges do not yield enough time to develop understanding between principals and their supervisors. While the literature confirmed the need to rethink leadership in public schools (Honig, 2012, 2013a; Honig & Rainey, 2014; Jacob et al., 2015; Jensen, 2013; Marzano et al., 2005), the data from this study specifically emphasized that principal supervisors must differentiate their leadership support based upon each high school's discrete context, comprised of students, faculty, families, and school leaders.

In order to increase the efficiency of supervisor responsiveness to principal and school needs, the supervisor principal ratio must be realistically proportionate to the time and effort needed for a strong, familiar working understanding of the experiences and obstacles that exist in this setting (Corcoran et al., 2013; Honig, 2012). Under an improved scale of fewer principals per supervisor, principals in this study would gain the efficiency they expect in responsiveness from their supervisors, rather than glib, generic solutions to the school context that is not readily understood. As districts consider site-based weekly campus visits, the recommended ratio should be approximately 10:1 so that supervisors can be present at least one part of a school day weekly at each school they serve. This redesign would allow supervisors to have more time for directly observing and aiding campuses and to have a clearer understanding of the challenging environments found in economically disadvantaged schools, the data that describe each school, and the people who serve the students attending each school.

Additionally, principals stated that district leaders must not treat one school community exactly the same as another, as each school culture can be vastly different due to varying needs, staff, students, and neighborhoods. School supervisory support can be tiered by specificity based upon differentiation and the unique issues facing leaders at these schools. Interestingly, research has shown that in many districts, principal supervisors have high ratios of principals to oversee with their focus being on supervising adherence to deadlines rather than on having reflective collaboration (Barnes et al., 2017; Corcoran et al., 2013; Mader, 2016).

The principals in this study emphasized that principal supervisors should not generalize leadership between contexts because their leadership directives become inapplicable among schools' various, unique settings. With this in mind, Knapp et al. (2010) underscored districts needing to assign principal supervisors to utilize their complete position, time, and effort for working with school principals to build aptitudes for instructional leadership on each campus. Furthermore, the ratio for principal supervisors and principals must be reduced (Honig, 2012) in order for the trusted partner relationships to affect positively the discrete situations that school leaders experience in their unique school contexts.

Communicate and maintain clear expectations. High school principals in this study stated they expected their supervisors to be clear in their messaging and in their expectations for the principal and school performance. Respondents' illustrations of this phenomena support previous research findings (Fuller & Hollingsworth, 2013; Honig, 2012; Jacob et al., 2015). School principals are often puzzled by the entanglements occurring between the confusing goals, unclear outcomes, and unguided expectations that are not clearly mapped out by their supervisors or by central office administrators (Derrington & Sanders, 2011; Honig & Rainey, 2014; Lavigne et al., 2016). Furthermore, efficiency for principals in low income school environments, could

increase in communication for clear expectations, so campus leaders know district expectations and desired outcomes for school leadership.

The principal participants' descriptions of their supervisors in this study represented principal supervisors as showing a lack of understanding and not providing clear expectations; this representation did align with the literature (Honig & Rainey, 2014; Vander Ark & Ryerse, 2017). The data revealed similarities to findings by Derrington and Sanders (2011) in which misalignment occurred between the expectations communicated to principals by central office administrators and the actual processes of principal supervision, leadership growth, and evaluation. Barnes et al. (2017) revealed that principals credit their advancement as instructional leaders by undergoing the experience of learning and doing the work, as opposed to understanding the expectations. Similarly, this study's principals highlighted their struggle for clear direction and understanding of wavering expectations. The participating principals noted when central office personnel or their supervisors' instructions are altered, they must then reallocate additional time to those projects and lose instructional leadership time because they have to recreate reports for which their supervisors had not communicated expectations clearly at the outset. The data showed that principals believed these supervisor and central office administrator missteps wasted their time and prevented them from attaining success and value with their stakeholders.

Aguilar and Edwards (2014) contended that institutional congruence, a method in which school districts establish consistency, is crucial for reform efforts to embrace change at the central office. Principals in this study agreed that the principal supervisor would best support the principals with their leadership in terms of better communicating their expectations, messaging plans, and clear outcomes. Supervisors need to provide examples of how the instructional

coaching cycles should operate and appear in practice. Overall, participants wanted their principal supervisors navigating the expectations of various district-level initiatives and programs for effective implementation and communication at the school level. This observation supports previous research findings in which a lack of clarity and vision lead to contradictions in responsibilities and misalignment between district and campus leaders (Honig, 2012; Honig & Rainey, 2014; Straw et al., 2013). Supervisors can affect change and support for principals when initiatives, expectations, and projects are clearly explained (Corcoran et al., 2013). Principals lack leadership efficiency when supervisor communication leads to inconsistencies in expectations (Honig, 2012).

Honig (2013) asserted that design-based leadership research (DBLR) could be used as a tool for improving the practice of educational leadership at the school districts' central offices. DBLR operates by the creation of designs for practice and is focused predominantly on designs for leaders. By incorporating this design instrument with researchers and practitioners working side-by-side, best practices for central office communication capacity could be developed. Thus, supervisors would have designs and tools to effectually use in supporting clear expectations for campus-based leaders.

In conclusion, principals in this study agreed principal supervisors must provide solution-based support correlated to the unique school environments they serve. They also stated that clarity in expectations and clear communication from their supervisors are necessary for their leadership success. Research and practitioner design work could hold promising outcomes for increasing supervisory understanding of distinct, school-based supports, and for redesigning systems for effective communication from central office. With these improvements, efficiency

could be gained at the campus level, leading school principals to garner more time to devote to student academic achievement.

Limitations of the Study

The limitations of this study apply to the applicability of the grounded theory between principal supervisors and principals of high poverty high schools. It is essential to recognize and know that these limitations are present. While the theory presents sound recommendations derived from the participants' data, the limitations to the findings warrant further discussion as follows:

- The total sample was formed in one specific state. Questionnaire respondents were invited from all over the state of Texas; however, this pool is not representative of the larger body of high school principals across the country or internationally. Thus, the findings may not be appropriate for other settings in various locales or other high-need high school campuses.
- The interview sample of seven principals represented only the North Texas region. This scope of geographic location did not enable the research to be universally applied to other campus leaders in numerous high need high schools across Texas, US, or other countries.
- The results of the study represented data collected only from high school principals, and the findings might not apply to the supervisory needs of elementary or middle school principals. Additionally, these results might not transfer to principals of high schools representing different socioeconomic conditions.

- The brevity of the open-ended responses from some questionnaire respondents limited the extent to which the qualitative, rich data could be explored, which limited the scope of the analysis and might affect transferability of the findings
- The varying responses from questionnaire participants showed the findings reflected a limitation based on potential lack of understanding the participating principals might have had about the role of a principal supervisor as a coach, mentor, and supervisor versus the role of a principal evaluator as someone tasked with evaluating the work of a principal. This limitation might affect the findings' transferability to school district settings of different characteristics.

Recommendations for Future Research

Honig and Rainey (2014) noted that school principals have been a “sorely neglected population in both the practice and research of professional learning” (p. 39). This study contributed new knowledge about principals needs for supervision. Nonetheless, the findings lead to three major recommendations for potential new areas of research:

- A study about the challenges of staffing inequities is needed. The research could be focused on funding formula differences between high poverty and non-high-poverty schools.
- Because “relatively little is known” about what experiential supervision strategies school principals believe most effectively enable them to achieve their central offices' desired student academic outcomes (Jacob et al., 2015, p. 314) and because of the data in this study, case studies of supervisor-principal dyads could be enlightening about how the phenomenon operates in professional practice.

- A study is warranted to understand the distinctions between the circumstances in smaller versus larger school districts regarding the differences of patterns and access of principals to executive leadership regarding principal supports.
- Further research on the alignment of principal supervisor assignments is suggested to investigate the associations between principal supervisors' experiences; levels of schools as elementary, middle, or high school; and effectiveness in leading principals they.
- The leadership development of principal supervisors has mainly been approached in the literature through suggested frameworks or suggested roles and responsibilities (Aguilar & Edwards, 2014; Derrington & Sanders, 2011; Hall et al., 2016; Williamson & Blackburn, 2016). The literature lacks empirical data. With the principals in this study expressing concerns about their supervisors' practices of "falling back" on their past experiences as principals as a form of guidance, empirical study of the leadership development and practices of principal supervisors could improve the supervision experiences of principals serving high-poverty high schools.

Chapter 5 Summary

The accountability for marginalized students to achieve academic success and college/career readiness is critical. School districts must be responsive to the needs of equity for economically disadvantaged high school communities and the leaders who serve in these contexts. The work to advocate for these schools and their respective leaders requires a high level of influence. For transformation, the principal supervisor is equipped to provide support and increase improvement of principal and instructional leadership effectiveness over time. If improved quality in central office leadership translates into high-quality teacher recruitment and

retention, reflective principal practices, and clear district processes, expectations, and communication, then student achievement is in a position to improve. Specifically, low income students can benefit tremendously by improved district conditions where their interests are the focus for leadership.

The findings described the experiences of high school principals who serve economically disadvantaged school communities throughout the state of Texas and represented the needs, recommendations, and expectations these principals have for the supervisors. The data demonstrated the needs for central office transformation to better equip school leaders to increase student achievement in their respective schools. The importance of recruiting, retaining, and allocating equitable staffing formulas are tantamount to these school's success. In addition, the data revealed that districts need to focus on principal partnerships with their supervisors to engage in thought leadership and leadership capacity. Moreover, district leaders must design supervisor-principal ratios to ensure supervisors spend quality time with principals and focus their full attention on improving leadership practices within high poverty high schools.

Furthermore, the study highlighted the communication supports necessary for creating efficiency for schools and leaders to attain success. The result of implementing more streamlined district practices may result in more support for leadership and school success. The theory of transformation of the principal supervisor structure has possibilities to benefit other central office procedures and positive impacts for school districts. The constructed model has a design to benefit other districts seeking to create conditions for supporting and building leadership capacity for principals in these districts' highest needs high schools.

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APPENDIX A
QUESTIONNAIRE

The questionnaire will contain five Likert-type items. The item ratings will be classified as follows: 1 = *strongly disagree*, 2 = *disagree*, 3 = *no opinion*, 4 = *agree*, 5 = *strongly agree*.

The items are the following:

1. My supervisor is able to effectively assist me with leadership needs.
2. My supervisor's expectations are clearly communicated.
3. My school needs are understood by my supervisor.
4. My supervisor is easily approachable.
5. My supervisor regards me as a partner in our effort to lead the school where I serve as principal.

The next five questions on the questionnaire will be short answer, open-ended items.

These five questions will be used to obtain the participants' perspectives about their supervisors.

They are the following.

1. How do you describe the support you need for leadership to your supervisor?
2. What are your supervisors' expectations for you as a principal?
3. How do you describe your perspective of your supervisor's understanding of your school's needs?
4. What are your experiences with your supervisor's approach to support academic achievement at your campus?
5. How can your supervisor partner with you to increase your leadership capacity?

APPENDIX B

INTENSIVE INTERVIEW

Describe your most prominent needs as a principal serving a campus with high numbers underprivileged high school students? (RQ1)

1. How do you describe your most prominent needs to your supervisor?
2. How do you describe your supervisor's communication regarding your needs?
3. What are the best support approaches your supervisor provides you in enabling the creation of optimal conditions for academic achievement in your high school environment?
4. What strategies do you use to communicate your needs?
5. What suggestions would you give your supervisor in meeting your prominent needs to your school?
6. What types of assistance do you need from your supervisor to be more effective in addressing your most pressing needs?
7. What areas would you like to see you and your supervisor improve in planning for school improvement at your campus to meet your needs?
8. What elements of partnership can you describe between you and your supervisor while working together to meet your needs and the needs of the campus?
9. How do you describe the way in which your supervisor provides you a needs analysis?
10. How does your supervisor show you support?

What are your supervisors' expectations for you as a principal? (RQ2)

1. What are your supervisor's expectations? What tasks are required of you by your supervisor?
2. When your supervisor gives you advice (about how to meet expectations), how does your supervisor deliver it?
3. How does your supervisor show you respect for your professional autonomy for meeting expectations (and supervising your school's teachers and staff)?
4. How does your supervisor provide you with feedback about your efforts to meet expectations?
5. What methods does your supervisor utilize to share data regarding your school's progress toward expectations with you?
 - a. How do you describe your supervisor's reactions/responses when your school has low performing student achievement data?
6. How do you describe the structure and experience of improvement (expectation) conversations with your supervisor?
7. When you tell your supervisor you need help to achieve an objective or expectation, what happens?
8. How forthcoming is your supervisor with honestly telling you about a problem in/at your school that could affect your ability to meet expectations?
9. How does your supervisor react when you have achieved an objective or expectation successfully?
10. How frequently does your supervisor visit your campus to measure your progress toward meeting expectations?

- a. What types of activities does your supervisor engage in when he/she visits the campus?
- b. Does your supervisor set up scheduled visits? If so, are they helpful? If not, would you prefer he/she did set up scheduled visits?
- c. Does your supervisor conduct unscheduled visits? If so, are they helpful? If not, would you prefer he/she did conduct unscheduled visits?

How can your supervisor assist you in being a more effective leader? (RQ3)

1. How does your supervisor coach you so you can implement effective instructional leadership strategies?
2. If you have a problem what role does your supervisor play in supporting you or enabling you to solve the problem as the leader of your school?
3. How do you describe the ways in which your supervisor responds to your leadership of your school?
4. What limitations would you describe that exist in your relationship, given you and your supervisors are both educational leaders?
5. Please describe what your supervisor could do better to improve your leadership capacity.
6. Regarding your supervisor's leadership, what would you want him/her to change? Why?
7. If you could tell your supervisor to improve in one area what would that be and why?
8. What types of assistance do you need from your supervisor to be more effective with providing feedback to the teachers whom you lead?

9. What types of assistance do you need from your supervisor to be more effective with time management as you lead your campus?