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Instructional Leadership and Self-Efficacy: A Case Study About Elementary School Principals

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Instructional Leadership and Self-Efficacy:
A Case Study About Elementary School Principals

by
Barbara J. Hall

An Applied Dissertation Submitted to the
Abraham S. Fischler College of Education
and School of Criminal Justice in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Degree of Doctor of Education

Nova Southeastern University
2024

Approval Page

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Statement of Original Work

I declare the following:

I have read the Code of Student Conduct and Academic Responsibility as described in the *Student Handbook* of Nova Southeastern University. This applied dissertation represents my original work, except where I have acknowledged the ideas, words, or material of other authors.

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Barbara J. Hall
Name

March 19, 2024
Date

Abstract

Instructional Leadership and Self-Efficacy: A Case Study About Elementary School Principals. Barbara J. Hall, 2024: Applied Dissertation, Nova Southeastern University, Abraham S. Fischler College of Education and School of Criminal Justice. Keywords: principals, elementary schools, self-efficacy, instructional leadership, education

The aim of this applied dissertation was to develop a better understanding of how elementary principals in a large school district in the southeastern United States perceive their self- efficacy as instructional leaders and administrators. The pressures of high accountability play an impactful role in how principals view their roles and their ability to perform effectively.

This qualitative case study utilized interviews and Photovoice for data collection. Participants were six elementary school principals from the same southeastern school district. Participants were interviewed independently. A second, photo-elicited interview was conducted with each participant to discuss the significance of their photographs. A reflexive, thematic approach was used for data analysis. Nine significant themes were deduced from the data: (a) principals possess high-level skill sets and abilities, (b) principals have a high level of perceived self-efficacy, (c) prioritize time management to fulfill critical obligations, (d) leading with compassion and flexibility fosters trust and a sense of community, (e) connect with stakeholders to build collaborative relationships, (f) professional training programs greatly impact job performance, (g) professional relationships increase perceived levels of self- efficacy, (h) leadership experiences both increase and decrease perceived levels of self- efficacy, and (i) negative experiences can increase perceived self-efficacy levels

Study findings indicated an integral connection between self-efficacy and leadership performance and may provide valuable insight for the development of principal preparation curriculum and professional development. The researcher recommends further qualitative studies on this phenomenon using larger sample sizes.

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I first give honor to God my Creator, my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and the precious Holy Spirit, my comforter and guide without whom this honor would not be possible.

I dedicate this dissertation to my children who are my heart, who gave me the strength and courage to keep going because they believed in me. Thank you, Therell Wayne Hall, Jr., Amber Nadine Hall, and Audra Nicole Hall. When Therell was taken from us it left a crater in my heart, but I could still hear him saying, “You’ve got this mom, you’re a soldier!” Amber and Audra, my beautiful duo, may this achievement serve to remind you that no matter how hard the path, it’s never too late to make dreams come true. To my amazing grandsons, Therell, III, Micah, and Josiah, you come from greatness. Nothing at all is impossible when you believe. I give special honor to my loving mother, Marilyn Maria Williams Hypolite, my first teacher and the one who introduced me to the wonderful world of reading and learning. I honor you with this doctorate. You have been my greatest cheerleader through every phase of my life, and every endeavor. Your prayers and faith have carried me. To my siblings Debra, Brannigan, Ellen Peterson, Steven Williams, and Francine DeLande, I love you dearly. Thank you for always loving your baby sister. Francine you are ever standing beside me, the wind beneath my wings.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The measurement of student achievement is necessary and justifiable as is the accountability of administrators and teachers. However, the rating of educator performance based on student standardized test scores has come under increasing scrutiny by individuals and organizations that support educators and public education (Basileo & Toth, 2019; Wieczorek et al., 2019). The implementation of educator evaluation systems substantially linked to student test scores has been the subject of significant debate at national, state, and district levels (Smith & Kubacka, 2017; U.S. Department of Education, 2012; White House, 2014).

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB, 2002) opened a national debate on the state of U.S. public education. This debate spawned public demands for greater accountability of educators in the public educational system. The result was an unprecedented flood of educational policies aimed at reconstructing the nation's public education system. Consequently, the issue of how to improve student performance became a topic of fervent discussion. Another area that came under intense scrutiny was how to make teachers and principals more accountable for student learning and how to evaluate their effectiveness in promoting student achievement. Federal lawmakers wrangled over legislation that would govern the way states measured student and educator performance (Wieczorek et al., 2019). The resulting consensus was that principals are directly responsible for teacher performance and student learning (Denecker, 2019; Donaldson et al., 2021; Reid, 2020).

Statement of the Problem

The problem is that as the role of school principal has continued to change and

evolve, principals have been inundated with additional job responsibilities and accountability. Principals are directly responsible for performance evaluations of all teachers under their supervision, leading in the acquisition, interpretation, and management of student data, and providing instructional leadership to optimize the professional development and performance of their teachers. Additionally, the tragic mass shooting at a South Florida high school in 2018 added the weighty responsibility of safety director for all school principals within that district. The COVID-19 pandemic presented yet another dimension of administrative responsibility as principals were forced to pivot the entire instructional delivery system to a virtual platform then implement and manage health safety protocols once schools reopened (Azukas, 2021; Curry & Wolf, 2017; Evie, 2018; Superville, 2018). In conjunction with these leadership requirements, principals are also expected to effectively manage their school budget, maintain a positive and productive school climate, and ensure that daily operations run optimally within their school building (Carbaugh & Marzano, 2018; Denecker, 2019).

Wilcher (2014) intimated that although principals tend to be in favor of the current evaluation systems, many feel overwhelmed by the many roles they must play to satisfy the requirements specified by newly reformed performance expectations. Despite their favorable views about the reformed evaluation systems, principals also feel tremendous pressured to motivate teachers and students and do not have enough time—and in some cases, adequate experience, knowledge, or resources to do their job as effectively as they think they could under less demanding circumstances (Bell-Erwanger, 2019; Stanford, 2023).

Phenomenon of Interest

The focus of this qualitative study was to investigate the perceived self-efficacy of select principals as instructional leaders within the context of a test-based performance evaluation system in the largest school district in the southeastern United States. The researcher endeavored to understand how principals have adjusted their leadership beliefs, style, and focus to align their performance with the requirements specified in the five original domains of the Marzano Principal Evaluation Model: (a) use of data to drive instruction, (b) continuous improvement of instruction, (c) a guaranteed and viable curriculum, (d) opportunities for cooperative collaboration, and (e) school climate (Carbaugh et al., 2014). In 2018, the model was renamed the Marzano Focused School Leader Evaluation Model and updated to include six domains: (a) data-driven instruction, (b) instructional leadership with a viable curriculum, (c) continuous professional development for teachers and staff, (d) a community of care and collaboration, (e) core values, and (f) resource management (Carbaugh & Marzano, 2018; Marzano Center, 2019).

The Research Problem

The pressure from federal and state legislators to increase teacher and student performance has been keenly felt by principals within the largest school district in the southeastern United States since 2013. Despite critics of high stakes standardized tests, and contrary to research evidence that supports the rationale for balance and validity in principal evaluations, the competition for Race to the Top federal funding by states like Florida seemed to remain the driving force behind the policies that govern requirements for educational leadership performance (Basileo & Toth, 2019; Marzano, 2012; U.S.

Department of Education, 2012).

Although Florida educational stakeholders have celebrated successes in efforts to increase teacher and student performance, many principals were left scrambling to make the adjustment from a more administrative leadership style to that of instructional manager and coach. Consideration must be given to the challenges and needs of principals as they continue to stretch and flex to perform the stressful and time-consuming duties as data analysts, teacher evaluators, and curriculum leaders. A better understanding of how school principals perceive their efficacy as instructional leaders is necessary for the creation and improvement of professional development and mentorship programs that are relevant and effective for this critical sector of the public education system (Corcoran et al., 2013; Bell-Erwanger, 2019; Westberry & Horner, 2022).

Marzano (2013), the designer of the Marzano Focused School Leader Evaluation Model (Carbaugh & Marzano, 2018; Marzano Center, 2019) used to rate principal performance in Florida school districts, suggested that there are many ways to monitor and measure student achievement. He also emphasized that the most effective performance evaluation systems include continuous opportunities for professional development and strong support such as mentorship programs (Marzano, 2012).

Background and Justification

In 1983, the National Commission on Excellence in Education published *A Nation at Risk*, a comprehensive report on the state of American public education. Former President Ronald Reagan assembled the task force to conduct a thorough assessment of the nation's schools. The task force returned with an unsettling report. Commission members declared the American school system to be in an unprecedented

state of disrepair. The report included statistics such as a 17% illiteracy rate of graduating seniors, a 72% increase in remedial mathematics courses being offered by colleges, and a consistent decline in the critical thinking skills and aptitude for science among American students (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). The commission pointed to a substandard curriculum, incompetent teachers, mismanagement of time, and a spirit of mediocrity as some of the chief causes for the prevailing issues in public schools (Jones & Egley, 2009). The historical commission called for unprecedented measures that would improve teacher education programs, invigorate academic offerings, and add structure to learning environments. According to Henniger (2004), the resulting report, *A Nation at Risk* served as a catalyst for education reform in two major areas, teacher education and student accountability. Through the heightened focus on student achievement, expectations increased for student performance on standardized tests. Teacher education programs were required to be more meticulous and uncompromising in their certification requirements for teachers (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983).

When NCLB was signed into law in 2002, it heralded the beginning of yet another level of federal involvement in the restructuring of the country's public education system. The goal of NCLB (2002) was to help ensure a rigorous and equitable education for all students from kindergarten through high school. The law was also designed to encourage higher standards of educator performance and accountability, which would ultimately lead to increased student performance nationwide. Although the legislation of NCLB included a mandate for states to test students annually and submit the desegregated data to Washington, the law allowed state policymakers to decide which

standards they would measure using an assessment of their choice. The initiative sparked debate over state versus federal jurisdiction of educational policy. National, state, and district policymakers intensified their analyses of public education curriculum and delivery. How to measure student performance, and exactly what to measure, and when, became a topic of intense discussion (U.S. Department of Education, 2002).

NCLB (2002) required all states to articulate yearly benchmark goals. Schools in each district were required to show sufficient yearly improvement, known as Adequate Yearly Progress, towards meeting their prescribed benchmarks. Schools receiving Title I funds (to provide for their high percentage of economically disadvantaged students) were penalized if students failed to show sufficient yearly progress. Such schools were subjected to participation in a 4-year improvement plan that would culminate in the achievement of the specified goals or the reconstitution of the school (U.S. Department of Education, 2002). Critics of NCLB argued that the law interfered with the right of state governments to act independently on behalf of their constituents. They regarded the requirements as excessive control and interference by the federal government. However, one major benefit of NCLB was that for the first time, a reliable system was in place for measuring and analyzing the annual academic progress of students in every state of the United states(Kim, 2021; Stanford, 2023; U.S. Department of Education, 2012; White House, 2014).

President Obama launched the Educate to Innovate initiative in 2009. The vision was enacted to place national educational focus on improving instruction and student performance in the areas of science, technology, engineering, and math. The White House (2014) wanted to address the low performance of American students (compared to

their global peers) in the STEM areas (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics). At that time, Obama also challenged the nation to identify and develop 100,000 outstanding educators in those subject areas (White House, 2014).

In 2010, President Obama announced the inception of Race to the Top, a federal initiative designed to promote radical public education reform. States were required to complete applications for their share of \$4.35 billion in federal money earmarked for education as part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009. Each state was required to submit an application that included a proposal for statewide education reform to qualify for federal money. The White House claimed that facilitating competition between states and raising standards for student performance and expectations for educators would help resolve the problem of educational inequity among minorities and promote excellence in public education (Mendoza & Ramathan, 2022; Wieczorek et al., 2020). States responded to the President's call for rigorous educational reform by complying with the demand for higher educator accountability, more rigorous student testing, and the implementation of teacher and principal evaluation models based on student performance on state-mandated standardized tests. A concern with evaluation models that use student test scores to rate educator performance was that they pressure principals to encourage teaching to the test (Peterson et al., 2022).

Traditional evaluation systems examined the effectiveness of principals based on their leadership skills and personality traits as they managed the operation of the school building and supervised faculty and staff in the performance of their duties. Reformed evaluation systems require today's principals to evaluate teacher performance and understand how to collect, interpret, and manage student data in addition to the

effectively meeting the demands of instructional leadership and overseeing the daily operations of the school site (Donaldson et al., 2021; Lochmiller & Mancinelli, 2019).

In many instances, today's principals do not feel fully qualified to effectively fulfill nontraditional roles such as data managers and teacher evaluators (Acton, 2021; Postma & Babo, 2019; Stanford, 2023). The primary researcher of this study has served as an elementary teacher in the Florida public school system for 32 years and taught in the Broward School district for 16 years under three different administrations. During the initial implementation stages of the new evaluation model, the researcher's principal was evidently uncomfortable and unfamiliar with her new role as teacher evaluator and with the use of the complex online observation rating system. Consequently, the first administration to use the system was conservative in awarding positive marks to teachers and used the system to penalize teachers instead of assisting them with their inadequacies. In contrast, subsequent principals held pre-evaluation conferences with teachers to thoroughly explain the domains of the evaluation model, the areas that would be observed, and suggestions for how to prepare for formal observations. Questions from teachers were welcomed and encouraged, and teachers received assistance with planning for instruction if they needed it. Many teachers felt more comfortable about being observed because they understood how they would be evaluated and why. The district cannot fail to provide the tools and support that produce knowledgeable and efficient instructional leaders and then penalize schools for low performance. District leaders must understand what principals need and how they feel about their capabilities to adequately address those needs and provide support that will generate competency, confidence, and ultimately success for the schools' principals lead (Basileo & Toth, 2019; Pariente, &

Tubin, 2021).

Audience

The school district in which the research was conducted as well as other districts in the United States can benefit from the results of this study. A deeper understanding of the principal experience (challenges, needs, and perceptions about instructional leadership) could provide valuable information for creating and improving principal preparation programs, professional development, and support systems for professionals already in administrative positions. Educational policymakers at state and national levels could consider the study findings in the creation and improvement of educational policies that affect principals and other educational leaders. Finally, principals and educators who are aspiring to leadership positions can learn from the experiences of others through reflection and self-examination. This kind of reflection and awareness can motivate and inspire other educators and leaders to try to better understand their own strengths and limitations and embark on a course of action to acquire the skills and improved self-confidence that will translate into effective leadership and ultimately improved teacher and student performance (Gümüş, & Bellibaş, 2020; Kim, 2020; Murphy, 2021; Pariente & Tubin, 2021).

Definition of Terms

The following terms are defined in the manner that they relate to the research study.

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) was a federal mandate that became law in early 2002. The aim of the law was to help guarantee equity in education across all states and districts as well as increased rigor in educational curriculum from kindergarten

to high school. The law required states to create uniform goals or standards for every academic subject and choose an evaluation instrument to assess student mastery of the standards annually. The law also required states to submit the desegregated test data to the federal government (NCLB, 2002; U.S. Department of Education, 2002).

Marzano model is the principal evaluation system used by the district in which this study will be conducted. The evaluation model was designed by education researcher Robert J. Marzano and based on an exhaustive review of the research literature about principal evaluation. In 2018, the model was renamed the Marzano Focused School Leader Evaluation Model and updated to include six domains: (a) data-driven instruction, (b) instructional leadership with a viable curriculum, (c) continuous professional development for teachers and staff, (d) a community of care and collaboration, (e) core values, and (f) resource management (Carbaugh & Marzano, 2018; Marzano Center, 2019).

Photovoice refers to a type of qualitative methodology involving participant-generated photographs (Byrne et al., 2016).

A *Principal* is the chief executive officer in a kindergarten through Grade 12 educational institution is the principal. For this study, principal will denote the person in authority at the school site for an elementary, middle, or high school within the public education system.

Self-efficacy was defined by Bandura (1977) as a person's belief in his or her ability to perform a specific task or job. In the educational arena and this study, self-efficacy speaks to a principal's belief in his or her ability to create and implement a set of actions that will catalyze specific, desired outcomes (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2007).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the perceived self-efficacy of select principals in their role as educational leaders. The objective was to better understand how principals have adapted and redefined their leadership style and focus to align with the expectations of the state performance evaluation system, and the successes and challenges they have experienced while doing so. The study participants were six elementary school principals from a large school district in the southeastern United States. The research site was the district where the researcher was employed as a teacher for 16 years.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Since Bandura's introduction of the ideology in 1977, the concept of self-efficacy has been the subject of a vast number of scientific studies. Involving people's view of themselves and their capabilities, self-efficacy is an integral part of strong leadership. In this increasingly demanding era of education reform and accountability, school administrators face unprecedented challenges for which they must be prepared (Acton, 2021). However, having the necessary leadership skills and awareness of their responsibilities is not all that is needed to make principals efficient. Today's principals should also perceive themselves as capable of growing, learning, and adapting to successfully deal with the rigors of their office (McBrayer et al., 2018). Current literature revealed a direct link between perceived self-efficacy and performance as well as principals' beliefs and attitudes regarding their role as instructional leaders (Justus et al., 2023). The literature examined in this study also suggested more information is needed about self-efficacy and the role of principals from the perspective of those who serve in that capacity.

The purpose of this literature review was to elucidate the weight of the role of instructional leadership in education reform and how previous studies explored self-efficacy of principals as instructional leaders within such a context. The review also included literature about self-efficacy and its function in professional work performance. The researcher's objective was to examine literature that explored self-efficacy in the formation, evolution, and adaptation of the beliefs, attitudes, and leadership styles of principals to provide a historical context for the study problem, illustration of the theoretical framework in which the study was rooted, a synthesis of the existing literature

on the subject, and a discussion of how additional research should extend previous research.

Much of the literature alluded to the importance of self-efficacy in job performance and leadership roles such as school administration. An issue of great concern was the limited amount of training and preparation afforded principals for the multiple, complex roles assigned to them. For example, principals must evaluate and analyze teacher performance and student data. Both responsibilities require a certain level of expertise and self-confidence. Another concern was not having sufficient time to complete required leadership tasks efficiently (Shaked, 2022; Wang et al., 2023). As the effectiveness of a principal is heavily based on teacher performance and student test scores, the pressure to produce high results in both areas is significant. The ethical issue here is whether principals under such duress will perform teacher evaluations and handle student data with fidelity (Lochmiller & Mancinelli, 2019).

Deficiencies in the Literature

The literature review garnered educational system was plagued several quantitative studies on self-efficacy and principals that provided mostly statistical data. Out of almost 40 studies on principal self-efficacy reviewed by the writer, more than half were focused on high school principals and were designed using quantitative methodologies (Stanford, 2023). There was not an abundance of qualitative studies on the subject. Of those reviewed, some were mixed method studies whose primary focus was high school principals or a mixture of administrative levels (Versland & Erickson, 2017). Additional qualitative research (on all levels) is needed to give principals a voice in an arena where their voices have been so prevalent (Rice & Williams, 2022). The target

objective for this study was to create awareness among district superintendents and state and district education policymakers of the unique and critical needs of elementary school principals from the perspective of those who currently serve in that capacity.

Historical Perspective

In 1995, Florida began administration of the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test to students in Grades 3–10 to measure whether students were mastering benchmark skills outlined within the Sunshine State Standards. In 1999 under the leadership of Governor Jeb Bush, the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test was tied to school scores (Jones & Egley, 2009). Each public school's grade ranged from A to F, depending on the percentage of students passing the exams, as well as the percentage of the whole student body and the lowest 25% of the school demonstrating adequate growth in comparison to their performance the year before. According to Sandy Kess, one of the officials assigned to craft NCLB by former President George Bush, Florida's school grading system was recognized in Washington, D.C. and had at least an indirect impact on the creation of federal policy regarding school accountability (Jones & Egley, 2009).

Despite its commendation for holding teachers to high accountability standards, Florida's public education system was plagued with issues. In their landmark study, Thornton and Arbogast (2014) explored general concerns about Florida's public education system in a quantitative study. They examined variables they deemed impactful upon the quality of schools and student achievement in Florida's 67 counties. The study sample included data from 804 observations conducted over 12 years. After analyzing each county's school grade as well as demographic and socioeconomic factors, the study results indicated that many factors influencing the quality of Florida schools could not be

changed through educational policy because these influences included variables such as economic factors, county size, and revenue. However, administrators and policymakers could collaborate to identify and implement programs to address critical issues Like employment for high school dropouts and strategies for increasing the relatively low number of students entering colleges.

Principal Evaluations

As teachers were being held to higher performance standards, the spotlight also focused on the educational leaders responsible for hiring teachers and supervising and monitoring instructional practices. In their review of federal policy for principal evaluations across the United States, Donaldson et al. (2021) pointed out that historically, principal evaluation systems focused more intensely on personality and leadership style and lacked relativity to student performance. In his study of principal evaluation systems across 40 states, Goldring (as cited by Donaldson et al., 2021) established that the evaluation systems were largely used to measure a principal's efforts to establish school goals, create professional learning communities, plan rigorous professional development for teachers and holding teachers and staff accountable for student achievement. The focus was not on the creation of robust curriculum programs or monitoring student progress. The study revealed that many of the principals were uncertain about the true purpose of the principal evaluation systems and did not feel it had any significant influence on their performance or motivation. The national reformation trend was to adapt and incorporate policies that would make teachers and principals fully responsible for student learning and student performance. Critics of the use of standardized test scores for educator evaluations defended principals against unfair variables such

economic factors and unreliable scoring systems. They argued that the role of school administrators would only become more complicated and demanding due to pressure from political, community, and school organizations (Basileo & Toth, 2019). Data from an online survey by EdWeek Research Center (as cited by Libby, 2023) revealed that of the 870 school administrators, instructors, and district leaders polled, only 25% asserted that standardized tests provide valuable data for the school's use and despite the heavy pressure they feel to ensure students do well on standardized tests, principals do not feel they are truly beneficial to student learning.

Florida instituted Robert Marzano's model for teacher and administrator performance evaluation (Marzano Center, 2019). The model rates teachers and administrators on levels of effectiveness based on student performance on state standardized tests. When students performed poorly on such tests, teachers and administrators received poor ratings on their performance evaluation (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). The Marzano evaluation model for principals addresses six performance areas called domains. In addition to meeting the performance criteria for each domain, principals are rated based on student performance on the state standardized test, the Florida Standards Assessments. If student scores fall below expectations (based on previous years and student demographics), a principal can receive a rating of "ineffective." The goal of the evaluation system is to motivate educators to push student performance. High student achievement and the demonstration of student learning gains through Adequate Yearly Progress are necessary to receive a rating of "effective" or "highly effective" (Marzano Center, 2019).

Critics of evaluation systems that link educator performance to student scores

argued that this practice was unfair and counterproductive. They further contended that today's administrative evaluations rely on criteria and agendas that are outdated (Basileo & Tuft, 2019). Additionally, many districts fail to provide the support and educational opportunities principals need to meet evaluation criteria. These deficiencies have been exposed in research like Bingham's (2014) mixed-method study that included an extensive literature review and surveys of 127 principals and superintendents. Among the first of its kind, the research provided insight into the impact and deficiencies of the evaluation methodologies being used. For example, only 3 of the 10 participating school districts had utilized professional development components with action plans and leadership development opportunities in their evaluation systems. Those three districts also encouraged collaboration among educators through professional learning communities. However, none of the districts had offered mentorship opportunities. Kim (2021) asserted that standardized tests are a problem, and after a review of various studies across the nation, concluded that the tests themselves can neither measure nor validate teacher competence. Not only do the tests vary from state to state, but there is no way to know or measure a teacher's instructional methodology or the culture of the classroom. Regarding student performance, there are many factors about the student that a standardized test cannot take into consideration, such as their physical and emotional state at the time of the test. Additionally, the tests are designed to measure student competency on certain academic subjects while ignoring other subjects like art and physical education. Consequently, the results of standardized tests only provide a limited performance indication rather than a picture of overall growth for the academic year (Kim, 2021).

Professional Development

When considering the evaluation of educators based on student performance, professional development for educators must be factored into the equation. To be effective, all teacher and principal evaluation models must include components for measuring performance as well as strong, consistent educator support and opportunities for mentorship and professional development. Considering the intense scrutiny under which today's principals must function, a fair and comprehensive system for their evaluation is essential, and such a system should be the foundation for supportive and continuous development of instructional leadership skills (Basileo & Toth, 2019).

According to the 2018–2019 edition of the *Broward County Public Schools Professional Learning System* (Gohl & Leon, 2018), the goals of the district leadership programs include strengthening existing leadership by enhancing leadership abilities through personal and professional learning experiences and identifying leadership talent to develop new leaders. The district utilizes a pipeline model to facilitate the progression of leaders from the development phase to the induction phase while keeping a pace aligned to the needs of the cohort. Programs are based on contemporary research and aligned to the rigorous Florida Principal Leadership Standards (Florida Department of Education, 2019a). These leadership programs also contain competencies related to the duties of principals. Successful principals share their insights and strategies for best practices. One of the programs provided is a 1st-year principal support program designed to support and coach principals during their first year of administration. During this year, participants expanded their study of the Marzano framework and evaluation model to further develop their skills as effective evaluators. Support groups convene monthly to

provide an informal forum for discussing challenges, information, and any concerns the new principals might have (Broward County Public Schools, n.d.; Gohl & Leon, 2018).

Theoretical Framework: Self-Efficacy

This qualitative study was designed to explore the perceived self-efficacy of elementary school principals within a large school district in the southeastern region of the United States and to better understand the influences upon their sense of efficacy within the context of their role. The idea of self-efficacy is a fundamental aspect of Bandura's (1977) social cognitive theory, which established social experience, observational learning, and reciprocal determinism as key components for personality development, or one's sense of self. Bandura's self-efficacy theory established the concept that all forms of psychological processes influence the level and intensity of self-efficacy. Bandura (1977) postulated, "Expectations of personal efficacy determine whether coping behavior will be initiated, how much effort will be expended, and how long it will be sustained in the face of obstacles and aversive experiences" (p. 193). An individual's sense of self is a combination of personal attitudes, abilities, and cognitive skills. Additionally, as thoughts regarding consequences affect behavior choices, personal beliefs about possible reinforcements can have more of an impact on behavior than the actual reinforcement (Bandura, 1977).

Bandura (1995) explained that self-efficacy is "the belief in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to manage prospective situations" (p. 2). This idea places self-efficacy at the core of the self-system. Self-efficacy beliefs affect cognitive processes in different ways. For example, as most human behaviors are governed by premeditation that includes goals important to the individual, setting

personal goals involves self-assessing one's capabilities for achieving projected goals. Those with greater perceived self-efficacy set more challenging goals and are more committed to realizing them. Efficacy influences the learning, motivation, and performance of humans. This understanding is critical because individuals are almost always likely to pursue learning goals and performance tasks, they believe they can complete with success. However, efficacy beliefs reach well beyond goal setting into all areas of thought that affect the way people behave. One substantive purpose of thought is to allow people to anticipate events that may impact their life and then determine how they will control those events. When considering a course of action, humans construct scenarios in their mind. Their level of belief in their ability helps to shape the kind of scenarios they create and practice mentally before they act. Individuals with stronger beliefs in their capabilities envision scenarios that show successful outcomes. These scenes of anticipated success serve as reinforcement and guidance for the actions they will take (Bandura, 1995). On the contrary, those who doubt their efficacy tend to envision themselves as failures. As they do not see themselves as capable, they exert energy agonizing over their inadequacies and are often unable to move forward because they are afraid of failing. A strong sense of efficacy is essential for maintaining focus on the task at hand amid pressure and in the aftermath of hindrances and previous failures (Bandura, 1995; Lunenburg, 2013).

Bandura (1995) and others (Clark, 2001; Pajares, 2009; Stone, 1994) identified two categories of attributes within the context of self-efficacy relative to social cognitive theory. These were referred to as constructive attributes and potentially detrimental attributes. Constructive attributes describe the positive and beneficial qualities afforded

those with high self-efficacy. Potentially detrimental attributes are those potentially negative or counterproductive qualities associated with self-efficacy.

Constructive Attributes of Self-Efficacy

The concept of self-efficacy is complex as it has many constructs. Pajares and Schunk (2001) elucidated that a high level of self-efficacy facilitates the ability to see challenging situations as opportunities for learning. The drive to succeed fuels one's efforts to realize goals and achieve mastery. Additionally, people with high self-efficacy persevere despite failures and obstacles to their success. Instead of giving up, they are motivated to find ways to acquire the necessary understanding and skills to overcome their challenges.

Bandura's (1995) research on self-efficacy confirmed that those with high self-efficacy have more complex and challenging aspirations and are more committed to taking whatever measures are necessary for achieving them. This includes determination and focus as well as self-equipping through educational efforts such as training and mentorship. Further work on the theory of self-efficacy by Pajares (2009) supported these findings and further revealed individuals achieve their goals, this sense of accomplishment increases their self-efficacy—creating a favorable impact on motivation, determination, and performance.

Potentially Detrimental Attributes of Self-Efficacy

Although self-efficacy is associated with high performance leadership, balance is also important. In some instances, exceptionally high self-efficacy can cause deterioration in performance. Lunenburg (2011) defined self-efficacy as a type of self-esteem that is linked to a specific task. As such, individuals with a high level of confidence regarding

job performance can become overconfident and thus prone to making mistakes. An overly confident person can create an unrealistic perception of his or her abilities. This illusionary sense of aptitude can lead to errors in judgment, refusal to collaborate with others or to accept constructive criticism, and unwillingness to own personal mistakes (Clark, 2001). Overconfidence also can neutralize effort and motivation. People who believe they can complete a task with minimal effort are not motivated to learn new skills to enhance their performance. Their high self-efficacy causes them to believe they have all that is needed to do the job well and serves as a great motivator to get the job done (Bandura, 1997).

Self-Efficacy and Personal Motivation

According to Bandura's (1982) self-efficacy theory, an individual's motivation and performance are directly tied to their convictions about their capability to perform. In other words, what an individual believes about his or her own abilities governs motivation and the level of effort exerted in any given situation. In his explanation of the theory of self-efficacy, Bandura (1977) expounded on four sources of a personal determination of efficacy: "performance outcomes (performance accomplishments), vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and physiological feedback (emotional arousal)" (p. 193).

Performance Outcomes

Bandura (1977) delineated efficacy outcomes as a "mechanism of operation" (p. 193). Efficacy expectations influence behavior choices, which then influence outcome expectations. Outcome expectations are what an individual concludes will happen because of a specific behavior. Efficacy expectations speak to the idea that a person can

adequately perform the behavior necessary to achieve the outcomes. Efficacy and outcome expectations are distinguishable in that a person can understand and believe that a specific set of actions will lead to a certain outcome but lack confidence in his or her ability to complete the necessary actions. In such cases, having the outcome expectations does not affect behavior.

Successes and failures of the past have the greatest impact on self-efficacy. One is more likely to feel confident about completing a task if one has experienced success in the same or a similar circumstance. Successful performance contributes to higher self-efficacy. A person with greater self-efficacy is more apt to attempt challenging tasks and engage in more complex activities with better results than someone with low self-efficacy due to experienced failures (Bandura, 1977). Bandura (1977) explained,

Mastery experiences are the most influential source of efficacy information because they provide the most authentic evidence of whether one can muster whatever it takes to succeed. Success builds a robust belief in one's personal efficacy. Failures undermine it, especially if failures occur before a sense of efficacy is firmly established. (p. 196)

Vicarious Experiences

In addition to personally experienced competency, a person's efficacy expectations are shaped by the experiences of others. Bandura (1977) referred to judging one's potential for success by observing another person's success or failure within that context as a vicarious experience. Witnessing another person's successful navigation of a stressful or unpleasant situation can foster expectations within the observer of experiencing the same degree of success by expending the effort and persistence to do so.

Such vicarious expectations are especially true if the observer has a similar personality or skills as the person observed. In the same manner, observing someone's failure can weaken the observer's belief in his or her ability to perform with success. Vicarious experience is dependent on inferences based on social comparison and therefore is not as reliable as personal experience in providing information about ability.

Verbal Persuasion

Another factor that can influence one's sense of efficacy is verbal persuasion. According to Bandura (1977), the use of verbal persuasion to influence the behavior of people is a common phenomenon. Verbal persuasion has been used effectively to convince people that they can overcome obstacles that might have prevented them from achieving success before. However, efficacy expectations generated in this way are not as strong as those induced from personal achievement because they lack the experiential authenticity that is foundational to strong self-efficacy. However, merely telling individuals what to expect has little effect on their behaviors. Lick et al. (as cited in Bandura, 1977) conducted clinical studies utilizing suggestive methodology to raise expectations and had minimal success in influencing the adverse behavior of participants. The researchers did not determine whether low credibility of verbal suggestions or weakness in expectations was to blame for the inability to significantly raise expectations in the participants through verbal persuasion. Bandura (1977) suggested that in situations such as treatment programs, explaining to individuals that they may or may not benefit from their participation does not guarantee that the individuals will believe what was said to them. The possibility that individuals will not believe increases significantly when what they are told contradicts what they have experienced. In many instances the

objective of verbal persuasion is to increase outcomes rather than raise self-efficacy. In isolation, verbal persuasion lacks the power to produce an enduring sense of self-efficacy. However, when people are convinced that they are capable of conquering challenges and are provided tools and support for doing so, they are more likely to succeed.

Physiological Feedback

Physiological feedback, yet another key variable relating to self-efficacy, is a description of the physical (and emotionally related) sensations experienced before, during, and after a stressful or challenging situation (Bandura, 1977). Bandura (1977) characterized emotions such as fear, anxiety, and turmoil as “feedback” or “emotional arousal” (p. 198) that accompanies stressful situations like public speaking or chairing a board meeting. Bandura (1977) also asserted that in many cases, emotional arousal could provide information about an individual’s aptitude, making emotional arousal an essential agent for data acquisition regarding perceived self-efficacy during intimidating situations.

Extremely high levels of emotional arousal can extinguish or severely reduce self-efficacy. The most typical response to anxiety and fear arousals caused by threatening situations is avoidance behavior. However, according to Bandura (1977), these behaviors are typically a result of authentic fear stemming from deficiencies in skill sets. The fear and deficits are usually interconnected issues. The avoidance of uncomfortable obligations hinders the development of coping competencies, and the lack of competency creates fear. Bandura (1997, 1999) also proposed that learning methods for controlling menacing situations can extinguish fear arousal. Anxiety response to intimidation can be addressed effectively through modeling and completely eradicated by experienced success or mastery. Although physiological feedback is regarded as the least persuasive

of the four self-efficacy evaluators, it is quite relevant. When individuals feel comfortable with a performance obligation, they are more motivated and experience a more elevated belief of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977; Justus et al., 2023). To truly understand how people achieve and maintain a high sense of efficacy, it is of significance to comprehend how self-efficacy originates and develops.

Development of Self-Efficacy

The development of self-efficacy starts in childhood when children interact with their environment through a broad range of experiences. The acquisition of self-efficacy and its evolution span a lifetime. Self-efficacy grows as people acquire knowledge, learn new skills, and process experiences that deepen their understanding. Bandura (1982) identified four primary sources of self-efficacy: (a) mastery experiences, (b) social modeling, (c) social persuasion, and (d) psychological responses.

Mastery experiences are the most influential sources of efficacy. According to Bandura (1982), when an assignment is completed successfully, the sense of accomplishment promotes self-efficacy. In the same way, failure to carry out a duty or adequately deal with a challenge can diminish or erode self-efficacy. Social modeling is also an important factor in developing efficacy. People are continuously observing the behavior of others. When an observer sees someone with comparable traits successfully complete a task, the observer is likely to conclude that he or she is also capable of completing similar tasks with the same level of success.

Bandura (1982) further asserted that it is possible to convince a person of his or her ability to be successful. This persuasion can come in the form of encouragement and affirmation. Verbal encouragement such as the purposeful encouragement and coaching

provided in mentorship situations can promote the self-confidence needed to surpass emotions like fear and self-doubt that impede one's ability to focus and persevere until success is realized (Bandura, 1982). According to Manderlink and Harackiewicz (1984), rewards also influence self-efficacy. Rewards may be tangible, such as a bonus in pay or a written commendation, or verbal, such as praise for a job well done or public affirmation. Both types of rewards can affect self-efficacy in a positive or negative way according to the context of the situation in which they are given,

Bandura (1982) established a strong connection between efficacy and how people perceive and react to stressful situations and challenges. Physically, emotions and reactions to intense challenges can range from moderate to severe. For example, when faced with an unpleasant task related to leadership responsibility, one may experience physical discomfort such as an upset stomach or feelings of anxiety. A person with high self-efficacy would be more likely to regard the situation as a necessary part of his or her responsibility. From that perspective, the person would seek out the resources needed to fulfill the responsibility. On the contrary, an individual who perceives the challenge solely as a threat will most likely resort to avoidance behaviors while agonizing over what to do until he or she has no choice but to address the challenge. The avoidance stems from the feeling of lacking the ability to handle the situation adequately (Bandura, 1997).

Self-Efficacy and Performance

Researchers have drawn direct correlations between self-efficacy and personal performance. Barling and Beattie (1983) defined self-efficacy as a personal judgment about one's ability to complete specific tasks. For this reason, a person's sense of efficacy

has a direct correlation with the way they perform. Self-efficacy related to specific tasks raises the level of effort and determination exerted for tasks that are difficult. This increased effort and determination raise the chances of successfully completing such tasks. Redmond (2010) explained that self-efficacy is measured according to three scales:

1. Self-efficacy magnitude rates the level of difficulty a person thinks are needed.
to complete a given task (easy, moderate, or hard).
2. Self-efficacy strength measures how much confidence a person feels about his or her capability to successfully complete work.
3. The generality of self-efficacy has to do with the extent to which the individual applies expectation to the spectrum of circumstances, or the consideration of whether previously attained knowledge will suffice for handling new situations.

Early (as cited in Bandura, 1988) reported that employees trained in production techniques and provided with specified performance goals have greater beliefs in their performance capabilities. This increased self-efficacy promotes employee commitment to company goals and increased performance and productivity. In their model studies on organizational productivity as related to management perceived self-efficacy, Wood et al. (1990) assigned management duties to Master of Business Administration graduates and tasked them with matching employees to tasks, creating and implementing company rules, and motivating employees. Study findings confirmed a correlation between perceived self-efficacy and personal goals and the organizations' performance. Additionally, challenging goals in a complex organization such as a school, can

negatively impact employee efficacy and performance. Wood et al. deduced that the way managers and people in leadership positions handle decision-making in different situations can be better understood by evaluating how cognitive and motivational processes interact.

The School Principal

To understand the importance of self-efficacy as it relates to educational leadership, one must understand the context of school leadership and what it means to be a school principal. Since 2000, the image of the school principal has been transformed through the perceptions and demands of federal and state institutions as well as public debate and scrutiny. Principals were formerly seen as teacher supervisors and school disciplinarians. Their performance was rated by how the community regarded them and how the brightest students performed. The job security of today's principal is contingent on far more complicated and rigorous performance expectations. Their duties now include serving as instructional leader to their staff, managing and promoting student performance, maintaining public relations, and satisfying government policy. Their role as instructional leader encompasses a plethora of nonnegotiable performance expectations they must meet or risk losing their administrative position (Memela & Ramrathan, 2022).

In this era of unprecedented demand for performance accountability in educational delivery and practice, the roles and responsibilities of school principals have changed dramatically. Traditionally, principals served primarily as the manager of daily affairs in their assigned school. Their responsibilities included oversight of the school's day-to-day operations, planning and scheduling, budget concerns such as materials and

teacher salaries, school climate, and student safety (Schrik & Wasonga, 2019).

Today's principals handle approximately 40 tasks per day in their daily role as manager and instructional leader. These jobs require a knowledgeable and versatile individual equipped with a variety of complex skills. Managerial skills are essential for dealing with issues and individuals directly affected by the principal's decisions. These issues include financial obligations, school data, the staff work environment, and teacher performance.

The principal's role as administrator also encompasses the formation and maintenance of connections with stakeholders and the implementation and maintenance of state and district mandates that they must often fund (Murphy, 2021). School administrators must also be proficient in financial management and budgeting because they are responsible for handling the school's annual budget. As a financial manager, principals are required to oversee the allocation and disbursement of all funds awarded to their building in adherence to stringent federal, state, and district guidelines. They are responsible for the funding of every component of the school's function—from custodial needs like cleaning supplies, student materials such as textbooks, and facility needs such as telephone and electrical services, to the funding of professional development activities for teachers. The principal's duty also is to maintain a balanced budget by monitoring expenditures, cutting costs wherever possible, and securing fundraising opportunities to acquire additional funding for the school (Denecker, 2019).

In addition to their operational duties, the principal sets the tone for student behavior and achievement. A critical factor in school success is an environment that is safe as well as conducive to learning. The principal's influence is also a key factor in how

the school is perceived by education officials and the community. Apart from their work within the school, principals manage all external affairs. In this capacity, the principal's role becomes that of advocate, promoting positive public relations and acquiring additional resources for the school through venues such as community partnerships while promoting awareness and a positive public image of the school (Thomas-EL et al., 2020).

The School Leader

The most scrutinized aspect of principalship in these times is instructional leadership. Evolving research continues to confirm how the instructional leadership practices of principals directly and indirectly influence student learning and school performance. Principal practices encompass specific administrative skill sets, knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors. Comparative findings across research have established that certain practices link to student performance and schools that excel. These practices include coaching and mentoring, sharing a robust vision and mission, engaging in in-depth collaboration with teachers regarding student performance and instructional quality, effectively managing school resources (including human capital), and maintaining an environment conducive to the development and well-being of all organizational members. Additionally, successful administrators exhibit soundly ethical and professional conduct (Acton, 2021; New Leaders, 2019; Thomas-EL et al., 2020).

The instructional leader's primary role is to help identify and articulate the school's instructional goals and develop a plan for the individual and collaborative work necessary to achieve the targeted outcomes. Setting up systems for teacher collaboration and learning through ongoing professional development synchronized with the school's goals is one of the most important tasks for instructional leadership. Schools must refocus

on learning as opposed to being fixated on teaching if they are to impact student achievement. School districts that promote individual learning by infusing fresh concepts and innovative practices are more likely to garner the support and ready participation of teachers and principals (Kim, 2021; Lunenburg, 2013). The Florida Department of Education has instituted a highly specific set of academic standards for students from kindergarten to 12th grade. As part of the accountability system promoted on both state and federal levels, principals are required to instruct teachers in how to practice standards, plan and instruct for mastery, monitor student progress, remediate struggling students, use intervention strategies for at-risk learners, and enrich exceptional students (Florida Department of Education, 2019a, 2019b; U.S. Department of Education, 2012). To fulfill these and other obligations, principals must assume many identities under the title of instructional leader. Their obligations are far reaching as they endeavor to educate and guide teachers in every aspect of instructional practice and delivery, but school success is especially dependent on the critical roles of performance evaluator of instructional practice, instructional leader in special education, and data manager (Kim, 2020; White et al., 2021).

Teacher Coach and Performance Evaluator

Education reform has brought about a system that evaluates teachers based on student performance. This same system evaluates principals based on teacher and student performance. Apart from classroom teachers, principals exert the most influence on academic achievement. State-mandated assessments have created unprecedented pressure to drive students to meet academic standards for proficiency. Goddard et al. (2021), and Reid (2020) argued that the quality of instruction evident in a school is an indication of

the principal's level of commitment to the use of research-proven methods of instruction. The quality of instruction demonstrated by teachers is a direct reflection of principal practices and leadership skills. Principals are not only expected to eliminate the problem teachers, but also to recognize quality teaching.

The principal's most important job may be coaching and mentoring teachers. Coaching is an invaluable tool in the continuous professional training of teachers because it is an investment in the overall professional world of educators and schools. Through coaching, teachers benefit from direct, individualized help in addressing specified areas of need. The principal helps teachers identify areas of focus, helps develop a plan for addressing the need, and provides the guidance and support needed to carry out the plan to an expected outcome. In this position, principals should see themselves as a "lead coach" facilitating the engagement of teachers in a learning process that recognizes their needs as adult learners. From this perspective, they can assist teachers in reflecting on their instructional practice and finding ways to improve it (Mendoza et al., 2022).

Along with coaching, principals must observe and evaluate teacher performance. To perform this task with fidelity and competency, principals must be proficient in their understanding of quality instructional practice, academic standards, and scales, and how the evaluation system works. Very few evaluation systems provide a true measure of teacher quality, and most can be used in a punitive fashion, depending on the perspective of the observer (Marzano, 2012; Mendoza et al., 2022). In Florida, teacher evaluations are currently the responsibility of principals and assistant principals. However, formal annual evaluations that weigh most heavily in teacher performance scores are the sole responsibility of the principal. When a principal lacks the necessary skills, understanding,

or confidence to proficiently apply evaluation protocols, the resulting errors negatively impact evaluation outcomes. In his study of 12 elementary school principals in schools served students in Grades K through 8, Reid (2020) surmised that the work experiences of principals play a large part in determining how they interpret teacher evaluation systems. Each of the 12 principals were observed and interviewed in the evaluation process of at least one teacher and participants were interviewed three times within a one-year period. Reid concluded that three major factors determined how the principals made sense of new teacher evaluation policies and systems: (a) their years of experience as a classroom teacher, (b) their tenure as a principal, and (c) their number of years served as principal at their current school. Reid (2020) further concluded that these experiences all influence the way principals interpret, analyze, and enact the policies and system they use to evaluate their teachers. For example, principals with more experience in the role tended to rely on their personal experiences to determine what constituted good teaching, or adequate performance. New principals or those with less experience were more apt to be less rigid in their expectations. Those who had less experience and or less time at their current school were also more empathetic as their focus was on establishing trust and building relationships. In other words, a principal's values, beliefs, and prior work experiences as well as current context all serve to influence how and why they interpret and apply teacher evaluations protocols (Reid, 2020; Tuytens, & Devos, 2017).

Principals also have an ethical responsibility to use fairness and remain objective, despite personal biases when evaluating teachers. Principals are advised to keep the roles of coach and evaluator separate to prevent any negative perceptions from their

knowledge as coach from creating bias in their practice as evaluator (Shaked, 2022). Their role as teacher evaluator presents an ethical paradigm that adds to the weight of the office. Kim and Lowery (2021) illustrated a common struggle among school administrators, going strictly by metrical measures of the evaluation tool and district guidelines or judging a teacher by who they personally know them to be. Some districts in states like Michigan require principals to assign a rating of “highly effective” and “ineffective” to a predetermined percentage of teachers. This creates a personal ethical dilemma for principals since they are the ones to make the decision. It is often a discouraging and frustrating position to be in. On the one hand, they must adhere to the requests of their superiors and on the other, they must rate teachers who deserve “highly effective” as only “effective” to remain within the designated numbers. Likewise, teachers who are creative, loved by students, and whose students have shown growth, may receive a poor rating because not enough of their students excelled on standardized tests. This is especially difficult for principals who serve in areas where there are teacher shortages, and higher rates of teacher turnover as well as those who serve in schools with a disproportionate amount of economically deprived students. While they understand the need for accountability and effective teachers, principals expressed a desire for greater autonomy to help develop teachers who show promise and to rate staff in a more fair and realistic way. Principals understand that teachers are the most critical stakeholders in the educational process and as such their needs, and job satisfaction are as important as their accountability (Kim, 2020, Kim & Lowery, 2021 Thomas & Wieczorek, 2019). Another aspect of ethical responsibility for which principals are being held increasingly accountable in recent years is their exceptional student populations. These populations

include students with varying exceptionalities as well as gifted children (Bell-Erwanger, 2019).

Instructional Leader in Special Education

Educational reform in America also focused on improving the quality of education being provided for special education students, a population that has often been overlooked. Before the inception of exceptional student education provisions under the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (1975), about 1 million children in the United States were being denied a public education because their exceptionalities required specialized approaches to instruction, and 4 million children with disabilities were deprived of the educational services they needed to be successful in school. In recent years, students with a variety of exceptionalities are educated mostly in the general education classrooms with regular education populations. 64% of students ages 6–21 spend about 80% of the academic day in general education classes (Department of Education, 2018). The provisions of NCLB (2002) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 placed direct demands on principal performance and accountability as educational leaders. NCLB required schools to demonstrate Adequate Yearly Progress of students as a prerequisite for receiving federal money. The qualification for federal funding is determined by student achievement in reading and math on annual standardized tests, including students with varying exceptionalities. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (2004) further required that students with disabilities receive individual instruction in the least restrictive social and academic environment possible. In keeping with this regulation, principals must help ensure that the Individualized Education Program (IEP) for all qualified exceptional

education students in their school is implemented and maintained (Bell-Erwanger, 2019; Florida Department of Education, 2019b).

Sun and Xin (2020) investigated the level of involvement and how principals performed in their instructional leadership methods relating to special education. Their goal was to gain understanding about how principals viewed their role as instructional leaders for special education teachers and students. The study included 134 principals from one state in the northeastern United States. Analysis of study responses were divided into 4 categories, leadership in special education, leadership knowledge, leadership support, and leadership decision-making. The study results showed participant' lacked knowledge about special education laws and the needs of ESE teachers and students.

An important revelation was how principals perceived their role as instructional leader to special education teachers. Some principals reported they did not view their role as instructional leader of special education teachers as requiring any distinction from the way they interacted with general education teachers. This information was significant because special education requires a different structure and approach than regular education classes to accommodate students on multiple performance levels. A mixture of instructional techniques is used to facilitate student learning, and a large amount of time and effort is exerted in planning and coordinating a host of support services. The study results constituted a compelling argument for more rigorous principal preparation; increased support and accountability for existing principals; and the inauguration of district measures to provide, encourage, and monitor professional development in special education policy and practice across states (Sun & Xin, 2020; White et al., 2021).

Sun and Xin's (2020) study of 85 principals regarding the skills and knowledge of principals regarding special education, the delivery of special education services, ongoing support for stakeholders and the acquisition of knowledge and resources yielded similar results to the previously examined studies. Every Student succeeds Act (ESSA, 2015) was designed to shift delivery of instruction for exceptional students from separated classrooms in restricted environments to placement among the general education classrooms that are the least restrictive with students of a similar age. As instructional leaders, principals are also responsible for meeting the needs of all students—including those with varying exceptionalities. The principals in this study were found to have insufficient knowledge about regulations pertaining to special education. Moreover, the majority had received their initial training (which included a limited amount of instruction specific to exceptional education) more than 10 years prior to this study. The authors of the study advocated that current knowledge and continuous professional learning for principals were exigent to effective leadership for exceptional education.

In addition to inadequate knowledge and skills about special education policy, needs, and program development, another barrier to the implementation of an integral special education program was lack of funding for special education services. Principals alluded to their district's rigid budget policies and insufficient funding for staffing, programs, and technology for special education needs within their schools. Likewise, because of the pressures for student performance, principals tended to focus more on funding and facilitating programs and technology needs of the general education population. The study's authors concluded that better-educated and supported administrators would result in the implementation of better special education programs

and leaders who could facilitate equitable learning with better teacher and student performance overall (Sun & Xin, 2020).

Zaretsky et al. (as cited by Sider et al., 2017) explained that one of the foremost goals of inclusion in education is “to increase authentic involvement and the potential for success of all students in school, particularly those students with special education needs who are often marginalized in schools” (Sider et al., 2017, p. 25). In a study of 15 principals across four schools, Siden et al. (2017) explored principal attitudes, daily challenges, and critical issues experienced in the implementation and support for a special education inclusion program within their school. The study findings revealed the principals perceived that an inclusive school culture was paramount to the success of any inclusion program. They also believed that the level of that success is determined by their direct influence and involvement in being visibly present and supporting teachers, staff members, students, and parents. Additionally, the participants iterated the critical role of critical experiences within the context of inclusion in the shaping of their attitudes and approaches to inclusion education.

Data Manager

Educational research has underscored the importance of using student data to drive instruction and remediation. Today’s principals are responsible for helping teachers to interpret, manage, and apply student data in planning for instruction. Accountability legislation like Race to the Top and performance evaluation systems that link teacher effectiveness to student performance have thrust principals into high-pressure positions as teacher evaluators and data analysts. To perform these tasks with authenticity, principals must have a thorough understanding of the curriculum and state standards in each subject

area as well as the skills and confidence needed to teach and supervise the collection, analysis, application, and management of data. Leading an organization in gathering, storing, and distributing data and information is an enormous task for the leadership of any organization. The school principal must understand the importance of involving all staff members, delegating responsibilities, and communicating the shared vision if they hope to lead their organization to success (Bell-Ellwanger, 2019; Donaldson et al., 2021; Lavigne & Olsen, 2020).

While principals may be aware of the expectations for their role as data manager, they may not perceive themselves as capable of handling those requirements. In addition to having the expertise to manage the collection, analysis, application, and storage of data to create and maintain programs for improving their school, principals may be overwhelmed or intimidated by the prospect of maintaining a school community driven by data. Principals should afford their faculty continuous opportunities for developing and enhancing their understanding of interpreting and applying data to instructional practice with the principal as an exemplar model. The responsibility of leadership is to help stakeholders create and articulate the mission and vision of their organization. This job includes the identification of learning goals, plans for achieving them, and strategies for overcoming obstacles that may arise during the process (Bell-Ellwanger, 2019).

Technology has placed a large amount of data within reach of school districts today. Principals and teachers must be able to navigate an ocean of data to perform their daily duties. They must be adept at interpreting, analyzing, and applying information from diagnostic and norm-referenced assessments data, reading and mathematics assessment data, state and local interim assessment data, and data from remediation and

intervention programs. Despite this reality, many school leaders and personnel are deficient in the skills needed to analyze and apply data in a way to increase student performance and improve schools (Garry, 2021).

NCLB (2002) legislation stipulated data-informed decision-making as one of the recommendations and requirements for guiding instructional practice and supervision in all initiatives for improving America's schools. Likewise, district supervisors advocate that data can be an invaluable tool for carrying out federal education reform mandates and managing accountability networks. However, leaders must understand how to manage student data, which serve as the primary indicator of academic progress for students, teachers, principals, schools, districts, and states (Bell-Ellwanger, 2019; U.S. Department of Education, 2002, 2012). School districts use data for superficial purposes like meeting state accountability requirements as opposed to the more extensive work of exploring variables that increase or impede instructional and learning practices, even though such in-depth analyses could yield information that would deepen understanding of how and in what context certain variables affect learning. Professional development programs on the use of student test data abound, yet relatively few districts focus on the score patterns of individual students. Analyzing those trends, which are also referred to as student growth data, allows evaluators to make certain assumptions about schools, students, and educators (Clauser et al., 2016).

Since 2010, several growth data models have been adopted by many states as instruments for rating student achievement and school effectiveness. In recent years, growth models have been used as a standard for determining eligibility for incentive funding and grants. The Student Growth Performance (SGP) model is one of those

approved by education officials in 2010. The model is used to rank student growth by percentiles. The resulting patterns allow educators to make inferences about student progress and patterns in learning. The SGP model is now in use in 15 states and is also being examined for future use in assessing teacher proficiency (Clauser et al., 2016).

Clauser et al. (2016) surveyed 317 elementary and middle school principals regarding their use of the SGP to analyze student data. The researchers found 81% of school principals had used the SGP to gather information on school performance. Many of the principals also reported using the model to identify students in need of additional assistance and students who made outstanding learning gains. Principals also reported using the model for teacher evaluations since Massachusetts mandated the use of SGP as a component for measuring teacher effectiveness. Study results illuminated deficiencies in the principals' ability to analyze and interpret SGP data. Principals demonstrated no common vision or understanding for how to interpret and apply the data in decision-making processes. Whereas their willingness and efforts to use the model as a tool or finding solutions to improve their schools were commendable, principals urgently needed opportunities for developing the proficiency needed to correctly use the SGP (Clauser et al., 2016). At the time of the Clauser et al. study, no such program was available for Massachusetts principals.

Leading the organization in gathering, storing, and distributing data and information is an enormous task for leadership of any organization. Principals are tasked with involving all staff members, delegating responsibilities, and communicating the shared vision of the school, even during difficult times and amid extenuating situations (Bell-Ellwanger, 2019; Lochmiller & Mancinelli, 2019).

Leading During Turbulent Times

For educational leaders and teachers within the school district where this study was conducted, the last 5 years can be described as fraught with unprecedented challenges. In 2019, for the first time its history, this school district was faced with unprecedented trauma. A mass shooting at a local high school was carried out by a former student. Halfway through the following year while still reeling from the aftermath of the school massacre and the subsequent barrage of safety mandates, these educational leaders were tasked with navigating a national pandemic with the outbreak of COVID-19.

It has been established that even in the most general sense, the role of principals has become more complicated and demanding as they bear the responsibility for creating a school culture that supports diversity and the educational needs of all students and stakeholders while providing efficient instructional leadership (for which they are highly accountable) and overseeing budget, school security, and daily operations of the school. However, these additional crises have significantly raised expectations and accountability for educational leaders (Lochmiller & Mancinelli, 2019; Murphy, 2021; Thomas-EL & Van, 2020).

After the mass shooting in the BCPS district, the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School Safety Act was created in 2018. Through this act, the state Department of Education created the Safe Schools Division. Florida's public-school districts, all traditional public schools and public charter schools are governed by the safety compliance requirements delineated in Rule 6A-10018. F.A.C. of Florida state statutes. Of the eight compliance requirements articulated, four fall under the direct jurisdiction of the school principal.

1. A mobile security threat alarm system
2. A diligent threat management team
3. Safety incident data reporting
4. Regular emergency drills (Florida Department of Education, 2018)

The COVID-9 pandemic created challenges that were unanticipated by most public education facilities. The RAND Corporation's Spring 2020 national survey of K–12 teachers and principals along with data from school websites showed significant differences among schools concerning instructional plans for students, access to technology for learning, and teacher aptitude for distance learning content. Moreover, less than half of U.S. public schools had written protocols in place in the event of an extreme public health crisis such as a pandemic, and a mere 38 states had publicly accessible emergency health plans (Center on Reinventing Public Education, 2020; Hamilton et al., 2020).

The study also required principals to share their school's emergency preparation plans prior to the COVID-10 pandemic using the following five preparedness markers:

1. Providing devices (e.g., laptops, tablets) to at least those students who need them.
2. Training teachers on delivering online instruction.
3. Using a Learning Management System (LMS).
4. Providing fully online or blended learning courses establishing plans to deliver instruction during a prolonged school closure.
5. Establishing plans to deliver instruction during a prolonged school closure (Hamilton et al., 2020).

In addition, principals informed the study about whether teachers graded student work during the pandemic and predicted achievement outcomes for groups within their student populations for the subsequent fall semester (Diliberti et al., 2021).

The study produced evidence that although most surveyed principals had a minimum of one of the five preparedness measures in effect (84%). A very small number (7%) reported having all five. Elementary schools lagged behind secondary institutions in preparedness, and no correlations were found between school socioeconomic status and pandemic preparedness, or lack thereof. Research has affirmed that environmental factors do affect leadership performance and self-confidence (Diliberti et al., 2021).

Principals and Self-Efficacy

Preparedness for leadership in times of crisis is a critical part of the administrator's role, studies show that high level of self-efficacy as well as skills are necessary for success. Organizational psychologists applied the self-efficacy concept to professional leadership as professional self-efficacy, or belief in one's control over events and behaviors in professional life. According to Fisher (2014), the literature referred to two dimensions of this term: self-efficacy of the profession and self-efficacy of the professional. Self-efficacy of the profession pertains to the beliefs relating to a particular professional organization, meaning that the profession can impact individuals (Ford, 2014). For instance, instructors believe teaching can affect learners. Self-efficacy of the educator (professional) addresses the conviction a person can successfully perform the duties their profession requires of them (Gist & Mitchell, 1982; Skaalvik, 2020).

Hillman (1986) and Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2007) were among the first to develop scales used to measure the self-efficacy of educators. The work of Tschannen-

Moran and Gareis (as cited in Fisher, 2014) resulted in the first validated instrument for the measurement of principals' perceived efficacy. The Principal Sense of Efficacy Scale measures efficacy for management, instructional, and moral leadership. In one of the few qualitative studies on principals and self-efficacy, Ford (2014) used the Principal Sense of Efficacy Scale in his research about the self-efficacy of Massachusetts principals. The scale measured participants' beliefs about their ability to succeed within domain-specific areas of educator leadership. Social cognitive theory dictates that a principal's self-reported belief in ability to succeed within a certain domain is an indication of probable success in that domain. Ford's application of the theory was that a principal who believes he or she will be proficient in a leadership task such as providing constructive feedback to teachers after observations is likely to do so.

Whereas studies have addressed the self-efficacy of principals as instructional leaders since the implementation of test-based evaluation systems (Postma & Babo, 2019), qualitative studies specific to this topic and relative to Florida or the Broward County Public Schools were almost nonexistent at the time of this study. As the largest school district in the state, and a federal award winner for its ongoing efforts to raise principal accountability and performance, the district is a trendsetter in education. Florida Principal Leadership Standards (FPLS) are the core standards, or expectations for effective principals in the state of Florida. The state specifies 10 standards to which administrators must align through professional development curriculum that aligns with each standard. Principals complete a matrix that requires them to name the course they took, and a description of the evaluative tool used to measure their mastery of that course. However, much of the literature pertaining to Florida schools and BCPS's educator

policies has focused on past achievements and future aspirations from the perspective of state and district leadership and not from the standpoint of principals (Florida Department of Education, 2019b; U.S. Department of Education, 2012).

Principals bear the burden of facilitating and managing educational opportunities for teachers and students. They are accountable for every aspect of their school's culture and day-to-day facility operations (New Leaders, 2019). Regardless of training or experience, all principals do not possess the same level of expertise. Some were hired after the inception of evaluation reform, and their initial training and subsequent growth have been within that context. However, principals now close to retirement were trained under a different and less complex system of expectations (Postma & Babo, 2019). Those individuals have had to change from a more managerial style of leadership to a multifaceted leadership style that included realignment to accommodate new roles like data supervisor and teacher evaluator and mentor (Bell-Erwanger, 2019; Memela & Ramathan, 2021; Murphy, 2021). For these reasons, it is important for educational legislators, district supervisors, and principal preparation and training developers to consider the influences on principals' self-efficacy and provide adequate training prior to installation of administrators as well as continuous education and support throughout their tenure (Acton, 2021; Justus et al., 2023; McBrayer et al., 2018).

Schrik and Wasonga (2019) investigated the connection between the perceived self-efficacy of principals and their perceived outcome expectations for student achievement. They ascribe to Bandura's theory (2000) that self-efficacy and outcome expectations are relative to each other because efficacy expectations have direct bearing on outcomes expectations since it is an individual's efficacy ideology that convinces

them to identify and pursue specific results. Their study results were consistent with the assertions of Pajares (1996) that “an individual’s perception of the outcome and his value of the task necessary to achieve that outcome will regulate his behavior as powerfully as his self-efficacy beliefs, and independently of them” (p. 159). Schrik and Wasonga (2019) further argued that the self-efficacy of principals should be explored and addressed in tandem with perceived performance outcomes rather than in isolation as their perspective is important (especially when approaching the more challenging aspects of their job).

Methodology Used in Previous Studies

Most of the studies examined for this research on the self-efficacy beliefs of principals were grounded in social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1977) and used quantitative methodologies in data collection. A small number of studies utilized a mixed-method approach. The qualitative element was limited to interviews (Mahoney, 2017; Versland & Erickson, 2017). The researcher chose to use a qualitative approach for this study to realize the aim of the study, which was to better understand the perceived self-efficacy of elementary principals within the context of that role. The case study method utilizing participant interviews and Photovoice allowed them to convey their perceptions and details about their lived experiences in greater detail and with more autonomy than quantitative methods would have allowed (Creswell, 2012). This autonomy was important to the research because the phenomenon of study, self-efficacy is an innate characteristic that is perceived in a unique way from one individual to another based on his or her personal experiences. (Bandura, 1982.

Summary

In comparison to their predecessors, 21st-century school administrators face unparalleled challenges within the daily context of their leadership and managerial obligations. For the principals in this study these challenges were heightened by the need for additional accountability in certain leadership roles in the wake of tragedy and crisis. Studies examined in this literature review revealed that principals' practice and performance are highly reflective of their self-efficacy beliefs (Postma & Babo, 2019; Schrik & Wasonga, 2019). The research also revealed a lack of uniformity in the way principals are evaluated, a prevailing dearth of quality professional development opportunities and mentorship, and little reference to the promotion of efficacy among existing professional development programs (Superville, 2022).

Another trending issue experienced by school principals is the implementation and management of diversity-related programs. Principals must create a school culture that reflects acceptance. The school principal's awareness and understanding of differences among students and his or her attitude towards stereotypes and judgements have a direct correlation to the way they respond to such issues and how they find or create solutions for dealing with them. In the ever-increasing changes within our societal norms, principals must be prepared to create a climate of inclusion and equity and model the appropriate responses for students and staff. A foremost challenge to initiating diversity programs in schools is resistance. Administrators must have the efficacy to address teacher resistance as well as create positive links between diverse groups. Diversity training could help to build self-confidence and self-efficacy among principal groups (Pollock & Briscoe, 2020; Vilorio, 2019).

Furthermore, the researcher's examination of the literature delineated the greatest challenges for principals as time management issues and the tendency to believe they alone must do the job (Superville, 2018; Wang et al., 2023). Researchers also emphasized the relevance of self-efficacy to the performance of principals. Study findings implicated that since efficacy plays a crucial role in successful instructional leadership, greater efforts to understand how efficacy can be enhanced and programs for doing so should be more prevalent. The studies in this review consistently identified higher self-efficacy as an indicator of greater self-confidence, self-esteem, and highly effective leadership performance even in the face of challenges and adversity. Additionally, the literature exposed differences in how principals perceive themselves and how their definition of instructional leadership and its accompanying expectations has shaped their leadership style and focus. Study results clarified that style and even perspective were not nearly as influential on leadership success as the confidence, knowledge, and efficiency of principals (Acton, 2021; Houchens et al., 2017; Kim, 2020; McBrayer et al., 2018). Grissom et al. (2021) emphasized the importance of good school leadership, "A school's success is largely determined by the effectiveness of its principal—decades of research have made this clear" (p. 21). They adjudicated that after careful examination of the existing evidence, highly effective principals have these four major leadership traits in common, "Instructionally focused interactions, building a productive school climate, facilitating collaboration, and strategy management" (p. 23). Another crucial attribute of great educational leaders was their aptitude for maintaining an equity perspective in all areas of their work. It is the school principal (not the district that has the power to change negative perceptions and institute strategies for eliminating the persistent

achievement gap for populations of students who have been consistently discounted. Furthermore, great educational leaders are aware that human capital is an invaluable resource. They are intentional in building cohesive, trustworthy relationships with staff and other stakeholders. They illustrate a clear picture the shared vision of the school and raise leaders within the organization (Grissom et al., 2021; Wright et al., 2023).

Research Questions

This qualitative study was conducted to answer one overarching research question: What are the perceptions of elementary principals in a large southeastern school district about the demands of the position of school principal? The study was guided by four research subquestions:

1. How do elementary school principals in a large southeastern school district perceive their capabilities and level of self-efficacy for their position of school principal?
2. How have principals in a large southeastern school district adapted their leadership style to align with the performance requirements for their roles and responsibilities?
3. How do elementary principals in a large southeastern school district perceive the influence of professional training and professional relationships on their level of self-efficacy as a principal?
4. How have the lived experiences of these elementary principals contributed to their perceived level of self-efficacy?

Chapter 3: Methodology

Aim of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand and explain the self-perceptions and beliefs of elementary principals regarding their self-efficacy in their professional role. At the time of this study, selected group of participants served as elementary school principals in a large southeastern school district in the United States. In this chapter, the primary researcher discusses the research design, participant selection, and the instruments and procedures used for data collection. The researcher also explained the data collection process and how the data was analyzed and reported. Trustworthiness, ethical concerns, potential bias, and limitations of the study are also addressed in this chapter.

Study Design and Rationale

The design for this research study has its foundation in social constructivism. Social constructivist theory is rooted in the belief that individuals pursue an understanding of their world (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). “Individuals develop subjective meanings of their experiences— meanings directed toward certain objects or things” (Creswell & Creswell, 2017, p. 8). This variety of multiple meanings insinuates that the researcher must seek to uncover the intricacy of the views being examined instead of condensing them into limited groups of concepts. Crotty (1998) identified three major assumptions regarding constructivism:

1. All human beings create meaning while interacting with the world they are endeavoring to understand.
2. The historical and social perspective shapes how people interact with and

make sense of the world. People are born into a world that is already defined by the culture.

3. The basis for the creation of meaning always involves social interaction.

These assumptions guide the methodology of qualitative research. Based on these assumptions, this researcher can facilitate the sharing of individual perspectives with open-ended interview questions and can endeavor to understand the contextual element by personally visiting the participant setting. Note that the researcher's personal experiences in the field of education for 32 years also will help to influence her interpretation of the findings (Crotty, 1998).

There is a dearth in the literature pertaining to the self-efficacy of elementary school principals, and the few related studies that were conducted utilized quantitative or mixed methods designs. Creswell and Creswell (2017) defined qualitative research as "an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem" (p. 4). They further explained that the objective of qualitative design is to provide revelation and to explore a phenomenon beyond its superficial dimensions. This approach is distinct in its subjective approach and its focus on the unique interpretation of individual experiences (Creswell, 2012).

In contrast the purpose of quantitative research is to test a specific theory or hypothesis. To do so, the researcher engages large sample sizes for data collection, such as an organization, a large group within an organization (e.g. the sophomore class at a university, or the managers of all stores in a large grocery chain), or a community. The primary method of data collection are surveys that can be analyzed using statistics. The final report of the data analysis is conveyed in terms of numerical and statistical

information (Williams et al., 2021).

The primary researcher for this study sought to better understand the perceived self-efficacy of elementary principals regarding their leadership roles and responsibilities by studying their lived experiences within the context of their role, and to produce a narrative that would authentically articulate their stories. The nature of the qualitative approach was most effective for this endeavor. (Creswell, 2013).

Case Study Approach

Although there are many approaches to qualitative research, the five, predominant approaches— narrative, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and the case study method (Creswell, 2013). When the aim of the research is to explore the life of one or more persons, the narrative approach is used. With this method, the researcher studies the life of the person (or persons) and uses the data to create a story, or to retell the subject's story. This method draws from the humanities. anthropology. literature, psychology, sociology, and history. Phenomenology Is concerned with the essence of an experience shared by several people. This approach is well-suited for research that aims to describe a lived phenomenon (Creswell, 2013).

Drawing from the field of sociology, the focus of grounded theory is developed a theory that is grounded in data collected in the field. The researcher analyses a social process (behavior and interactions) among large groups such as a community.

Ethnography is used when studying people within the same cultural group and is most suitable for research that endeavors to interpret and describe shared patterns of cultural norms within the group. This approach is most often used in anthropology and sociology (Creswell, 2013).

Finally, the case study method is employed when the research questions are designed to garner and analyze data using multiple methods that allows the researcher to create a discursive explanation of the phenomenon that was investigated. The case, or cases may consist of a person, event, community of organization in one case or multiple cases, and draws from the disciplines of psychology, law, practical science, and medicine. Although these five qualitative approaches use similar methods for collecting data, they differ in the processes used in data analysis and the way the data is reported (Creswell, 2013).

A case study approach was used for this study. The aim of this study was to provide an in-depth description of the experience of elementary principals within the same school district using data collected through a variety of interactions with subjects through personal interviews, direct observation, field notes, and Photovoice (Stake, 1995). Of the five major qualitative methods, the case study approach was best suited for this study. This approach allowed the researcher to explore the phenomenon within its context using a variety of approaches which permitted the researcher to see and understand the phenomenon from more than one angle. This helped to facilitate a deeper, broader understanding of the topic of study (Creswell, 2012; Yin, 2003).

Leedy and Ormrod (2019) defined case study as a research methodology used to better understand a phenomenon or situation for which there is a limited amount of knowledge. The case study methodology was fitting for conducting a detailed exploration of the phenomenon of self-efficacy, and inductively examining and interpreting the data to articulate meaningful information regarding the phenomenon.

According to Yin (2003, 2014), the case study approach is justifiable when one's

research will address either a descriptive question such as what transpired, or a question designed to address how or why something took place. For these reasons, the qualitative case study method was most ideal for facilitating the intent of this research study.

Participants

The primary researcher determined that at least six participants would be needed for this study. Participants were obtained through purposeful sampling, a sampling method in which prospects are intentionally selected by the researcher for the express purpose of ensuring that the research questions can be answered through study and observation of the group, and that sufficient information can be collected and analyzed to provide a clear picture of the phenomena being studied (Creswell, 2012). The researcher also took into consideration the gender, ethnicity, and school location (district region) as much as possible when selecting prospective participants to create a heterogeneous group of participants. This consideration was essential to the researcher's desire to ensure the integrity of the study (Creswell, 2013). As an employee of the school district in which the study was conducted, the researcher was familiar with district policies and had obtained the support of her supervisor in securing the research site and flexible accessibility to the site after school hours.

Initially, prospective participants were solicited through purposeful sampling via emails sent to a list of elementary schools selected from the school board website. Only two principals agreed to participate. Due to the poor response rate to the emailed invitations, the researcher used snowball sampling to acquire the additional participants that were needed for this case study. Principals who were referred by the first two participants contacted the researcher by email and, or her personal cell number to learn

more about the study. The researcher introduced herself and provided a thorough explanation about the nature and purpose of the study. All were provided the formal email invitation along with a consent form. Upon receipt of each signed consent form, the researcher requested an interview appointment. Prior to the pandemic, participants were given the choice of location for the interview to ensure they were in the setting where they felt most comfortable. After COVID, participants selected a date and time to meet via ZOOM for initial and subsequent interviews. All were emailed a copy of the interview protocols and encouraged to contact the researcher with any questions or concern they may have had prior to the interview. Table 1 notes demographics of the participants.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Participants	Years as a Principal	Gender	Ethnicity
1	6	Male	African American
2	5	Female	Biracial
3	13	Female	Caucasian
4	5	Female	African American
5	13	Female	Afro- Caribbean
6	15	Female	African American

Data Collection Tools

The researcher used the following methods for data collection: (a) personal interviews, (b) field notes, and (c) Photovoice. A hallmark of case study methodology is direct interaction with the research participants (Stake, 1995). This is accomplished through interviews. The qualitative interview is designed to facilitate a conversation between a subject and the researcher for the purpose of investigating an identified

phenomenon (Yin, 2014).

Interview Protocol

Individual interviews that allow participants to respond to open-ended questions were conducted. The researcher developed an interview protocol directly related to the research questions. The protocol consisted of several questions to introduce the overarching concepts and to make interviewees feel at ease, and follow-up questions (probing questions) to allow responders to elaborate on previous responses. Both direct and indirect questioning were aimed at eliciting as much information as possible about the topic. A semi structured interview protocol allows a researcher to probe more deeply by adjusting the content of questions or asking for elaboration on given responses as needed. When necessary, the researcher rephrased a response as a question to solicit clarity or depth from the interviewee. The researcher used an iPad to audiotape each interview and took notes while conducting the interview for the sake of accuracy. During each interview, the researcher also noted inaudible responses such as participant demeanor, tone of voice and body language, as well as anything else of particular significance—whether verbal or nonverbal (Glesne, 2010; Stake, 1995)

Photovoice Protocols

In addition to interviewing, the researcher used Photovoice as a data collection strategy. Each participant was provided a disposable camera and instructed to take at least 12 photographs. They selected five photos that best expressed their experience as a principal along with accompanying written captions and a description for each photograph and what the photographs symbolized about their role as a principal. Participants used a Photovoice protocol developed by the researcher to guide them

through the process. Photography as a methodology for qualitative research has been well documented since 2000. In their review of over 53 qualitative studies between 1995 and 2016, Byrne et al. (2016) illustrated the value of participatory photography as a data collection method. The central focus of participatory photography is to create favorable relationships between researchers and study subjects, affirm and validate participants, and facilitate the disclosure of otherwise inaccessible facets of the participants lives and experiences. One type of methodology involving participant-generated photographs is Photovoice (Byrne et al., 2016).

Photovoice has become a respected and authentic data collection tool in qualitative research. Photovoice was presented by researchers Wang and Burns (as cited in Ebrahimpour, Esmaeili, & Varaei, 2018) as a method for participatory research that focused on communities. The term *Photovoice* alludes to the purpose of the methodology, which is to allow participants the opportunity to share their lived experience through photographs. The goals with Photovoice are the following:

1) to enable people to record and reflect their community's strengths and concerns, 2) to promote critical dialogue and knowledge about important issues through large and small group discussion of photographs, and 3) to reach policymakers. The main nature of Photovoice is a way to empower individuals to identify individual and social health needs and make changes to improve society where people live. (Ebrahimpour et al., 2018, p. 216)

Because participants take photos to record facts and details about issues that are significant to their experience within the context of their world, qualitative researchers regard Photovoice as a data collection tool that facilitates a deeper understanding of

phenomena. The methodology is applicable to every type of qualitative research, from phenomenological studies to ethnography and grounded theory (Baker et al., 2017; Ebrahimpour et al., 2018; O'Hara & Higgins, 2019).

With Photovoice, the researcher selects specific issues to explore within a predetermined context and then chooses individuals who are related to those issues and live or work within that context to participate (voluntarily) in the study. The researcher explained the aim of the study, how to use the camera provided, as well as ethical considerations. After the photographs were taken, each image was reviewed and analyzed by the researcher and participant through an interview within each participant. Because of the way Photovoice empowers participants and contributes to collaboration and understanding between researcher and study subject, the researcher believed this methodology would provide a more profound understanding of the phenomenon being studied that otherwise might have remained undiscovered (Ebrahimpour et al., 2018; Young, 2017).

Another goal of qualitative research is to capture the unique voice of each individual and to try as much as possible to allow participants to share the fullness of their experiences (Glesne, 2010). The researcher believed that giving subjects the tools to creatively express themselves in a manner that went beyond responding to interview questions greatly reduced anxiety and inhibitions. Taking their own pictures let participants choose what they wanted to present as relevant and meaningful from within their world and thus creates a level of authenticity that might not have been elicited otherwise. Educators and researchers have used photography to gain a deeper understanding of others and to facilitate their engagement with the concepts. Photos

communicate meaning even in the absence of words in a way that is concrete as well as symbolic. Reflexive photography is a valid tool for collecting rich data relating to personal experiences (Overmars et al., 2018; Sidibe et al., 2018; Wahab et al., 2017; Wallace, 2015; Young, 2017).

Development of the Instruments

The researcher created interview questions in four categories: (a) Introduction and Preliminary Information, (b) Self-Efficacy Practices in the Role of Elementary Principal, (c) Influences of Professional Development and Training Programs on Self-Efficacy, and (d) How Lived Experiences Helped to Shape Efficacy Beliefs. The interview instrument was validated using a process of piloting and revising the research questions. Qualitative researchers can boost the reliability of interview protocols and the quality of the data derived from their use when the protocols are first refined through a structured vetting process (Castillo-Montoya, 2016; Stake, 1995). The researcher assessed and refined the interview protocol by utilizing the interview refinement protocol for semi-structured interviews. This process included four phases: (a) making sure interview questions synced with the study's research questions, (b) organizing the interview protocol in a manner that facilitates inquiry-based dialogue, (c) arranging for peer review of the completed protocol, and (d) pilot testing the protocol (Castillo-Montoya, 2016).

After developing the interview questions, the researcher created a Table of Specifications (see Appendix A) to ensure that the interview questions adequately address the research questions and provide the type and amount of data needed to substantiate the validity of the study (Creswell, 2012; Yin, 2003). The table illustrates how each interview question corresponds to at least one of the research questions.

Additionally, the researcher solicited the scholarly opinion of a peer researcher and fellow cohort member who has completed the applied dissertation process through the Fischler School of Education. The researcher e-mailed a copy of the research questions and the table of specifications to the peer researcher through her Nova Southeastern University e-mail account. The researcher took into consideration the feedback provided as she finalized the interview protocol. A copy of the interview protocol can be found in Appendix B.

The researcher conducted a pilot test of the interview protocol by interviewing four elementary principals known to the researcher. The researcher is personally acquainted with each of the administrators and contacted them by telephone to solicit their participation in the pilot study. The researcher explained the nature and purpose of the study and invited the administrators to participate in the pilot test to assist in the analysis and refinement of the structure and content of the interview questions and the organization of the interview protocol (Castillo-Montoya, 2016; Stake, 1995). Once these recruits verbally consented to being interviewed, the researcher established a date, time, and location for the interview. Pilot study participants were assured that the interview responses were for the sole purpose of testing the interview protocol and that their responses would remain confidential. After establishing the interview appointment, participants were provided an article explaining the concept of self-efficacy and a copy of the interview protocol via e-mail.

The researcher interviewed four principals for the pilot study. At the beginning of each pilot interview, the researcher reviewed the concept of self-efficacy and its connection to leadership and job performance then allowed time for questions and

answers. The researcher encouraged each participant to answer the interview questions with honesty and transparency and to ask for clarification or for interview questions to be explained or rephrased as needed.

The setting for the pilot study interviews was determined based on each participant's preference and needs. One interview was conducted at the home of the participant, one was conducted at the researcher's home, one was conducted at a local Starbucks, and another via telephone because that participant was in another state. Interviews were scheduled for a 2-hour time frame. Two interviews lasted between 1.5 and 2 hours. Two of the interviews lasted longer than the 2 hours allotted because the participants' responses to some questions involved sharing details about their personal experiences that took longer than anticipated. Each interview was recorded using a small cassette recorder. The researcher used a new cassette for the recording of each interview and took notes for additional documentation of the conversations. When the responses were vague or too generic, the researcher asked questions to probe more deeply into the response. Upon the completion of each interview, the researcher asked for a date and time during the following week or 2 when the transcribed responses could be discussed to ensure they were given the respondent's intended meaning.

Only two of the four pilot study participants were asked to participate in data collection using Photovoice. These participants were given a copy of the Photovoice protocol developed by the researcher (See Appendix C), a 12-exposure Fujifilm 400 35 mm disposable camera, and a composition notebook for notetaking. The pilot study participants were asked to take pictures in their work setting that reflected their feelings and beliefs about their role and performance as a principal from Monday to Friday of one

week and to note the image number along with a description of the subject matter and any information they wanted to include about the image—including why they took it and what they were thinking and feeling at the time. (For example, Pilot Participant A wrote, “Exposure #3 – My cluttered desk. Taken on Wednesday and symbolizes the constant challenge of not having enough time to finish everything”). For ethical reasons, participants were cautioned not to take pictures of students or any human subjects to avoid any ethical violations. The researcher met with these participants to collect the cameras at a designated place at the end of the week. The cameras were taken to Dale’s photo lab for the film to be developed.

The researcher examined the photographs taking care to keep each set of pictures separate to see what the images were, then examined them a second time in conjunction with the participant descriptions. The researcher then created preliminary categories for coding the images. The researcher met with each pilot participant to discuss the images, their descriptions, and their meaning. Participants were provided a copy of their photo notes (referred to as their “photo journal”). During the discussion, they provided detailed information about each photo and how it related to their leadership experience and practice. They were animated and seemed to be forthcoming about their experiences in a way that demonstrated more transparency than in the previous interviews. For example, Pilot Participant B, who had served as a principal for over 20 years, became emotional as he talked about his experiences and the personal sacrifices he had made over the years. His photo of the school entrance had underscored the weight of responsibilities that he had never acknowledged before.

The pilot study was an invaluable tool in the development of the interview

protocol and Photovoice procedure. By the second pilot test interview, the researcher was able to revise several of the interview questions for greater clarity, and to garner more in-depth information from participants (based on the responses and questions of the first two participants). Conducting the pilot study afforded the researcher the opportunity to practice and refine interview techniques and modify them as needed. Piloting also allowed the researcher to experience the use of photography as a data collection tool for the first time. All documents and photographs from the pilot study have been stored securely in the writer's home office where they will remain until the completion of the entire research project (Creswell, 2012).

Data Collection Procedures

The school district's Institutional Review Board (IRB) required the researcher to list 25 elementary schools on the application to recruit prospective participants for my research. Upon approval from the school district's IRB, the researcher invited the principal from each of the 25 approved schools to participate in the study. Recruits received an electronic invitation via their district e-mail account that included a detailed description of the purpose of the study, the procedures for data collection, the study setting, and their rights and responsibilities as a participant. Two weeks after the initial invitations were sent, there were no responses from the recruits. The researcher sent a reminder email to each principal to reintroduce herself and to encourage them to review and consider the previously sent invitation. Two principals expressed interest and agreed to participate in the study. Since only two principals from this first round of invitations accepted the invitation, the primary researcher contacted the school district's IRB representative to request permission to recruit participants from a new list of schools that

participants The six participants for the final study were notified with a formal letter sent via e-mail (see Appendix D). Participants were asked to sign a consent form to further protect the rights and safety (Creswell, 2012). All e-mails were sent from the researcher's Nova Southeastern University e-mail account to each participant's employee e-mail address.

The first two interviews were face-to-face meetings at locations selected by each of the interviewees (meetings were held before or after school hours to avoid infringing on their administrative obligations). After these first two interviews, the research study was placed on hold by the school district due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The researcher received permission to continue the study and recruit participants for virtual interviews close to the end of the first semester of the following school year. After receiving the school district's IRB approval for the second time, the researcher sent invitations to 35 principals via their school email. There was very little response to these invitations. After waiting a period of two weeks, the researcher sent a second email to prospective candidates as a reintroduction, and to encourage them to consider participating in the study. Three principals responded to inform the researcher of their unavailability, and two asked for more information about the research. This information was promptly provided by replying to their email. Of the 35 principals that were invited in this second recruitment attempt, only one principal accepted the invitation, signed the consent form, and was interviewed by the researcher. because of referrals from the first three participants, the researcher was able to interview the final three participants over the course of the following school year.

Data Collection: Interviews

The first two interviews were conducted face-to-face while the remaining four interviews were carried out virtually via ZOOM in compliance with the “no contact” agreement with BCPS. The interviews lasted 1 to 2.5 hours. The researcher began each interview by introducing herself and asking the participant to share any personal information he or she wanted the researcher to know. The researcher then reviewed the meaning of *efficacy* and the concept of self-efficacy in general and as it relates to the study. The researcher answered questions and provided clarification about the concept of self-efficacy and how it relates to the subject personally and professionally. Finally, before proceeding with the interview questions, each interviewee was reminded of their rights and responsibilities as a study participant and reassured that his or her privacy and well-being would be preserved during the entire study process.

Data Collection: Photovoice

Participants were instructed to use their disposable camera to take a picture within the context of their job as a principal for a period of one instructional week (Monday through Friday). Photos taken could include places, objects, or events that did not depict students or adults (human subjects). Participants used the notebook provided as a journal (or a word document log) to record the exposure number and provide a brief description of each image that was captured, explaining what the photo depicted, represented, and their reason for capturing that image. Prior to COVID-19, the researcher personally collected each camera and the accompanying journal from the study participant at their school. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, the last four participants mailed their cameras to the researcher’s home address via the USPS in the padded, postage-paid envelopes that

was provided along with their camera when it was mailed to their school. Every attempt was made to prevent loss or damage, and to preserve the integrity of the study.

After an initial review of their photographs, the researcher contacted each study participant via telephone or email (according to their preference) to schedule a time to meet and discuss the photographs. For this photo-elicited conversation, the researcher did not have a set of questions relating to specific topics to ask the interviewees. Instead, the participants' revelations about the images guided the discussion as participant and researcher reviewed and discussed the significance of the images one at a time. Each participant was asked to choose their five most meaningful images. These images, the accompanying descriptions, and interview notes formed the basis for the Photovoice data analysis for this study. These photo-elicited interviews provided an additional opportunity for the researcher to interact with participants to understand and give meaning to their experience with greater accuracy (Saldaña, 2016).

Data Analysis

The researcher used a reflexive thematic analysis approach to analyze both sets of data. This approach allows researchers more flexibility in interacting with and making sense of data across qualitative data sets to produce a descriptive narrative. The data analysis then, is a more subjective process and the resulting themes are reflective of the input of the data, study participants, the study context, and the researcher (Clarke et al., 2019).

The researcher completed the analysis of the interview data in five consecutive phases or cycles: (a) getting a first impression of the data, (b) coding the data, (c) expanding and collapsing codes to identify and understand patterns, (d) writing memos

while repeating the steps of the first two cycles, and (e) creating a description representative of the meaning derived from the data. Data analysis for qualitative research should be performed concurrently with the collection of data (Clarke et al., 2019).

The researcher transcribed the first two interviews using an online tool called “Happy Scribe.” This online service allows users to upload digital audio files which are automatically transcribed. The researcher then edited and revised the resulting word file while listening to the uploaded audio for each document. Due to the substantial number of errors encountered while using this method, the researcher utilized the services of a professional transcriptionist for the transcription of the final four audiotaped interviews to ensure accuracy. Audio recordings were submitted digitally to the transcriptionist as each one was concluded (Bickman & Rog, 2008; Saldaña, 2016).

The transcriptionist sent the interview transcripts to the researcher by electronic mail as they were completed. As each completed transcripts was received from the transcriber, the researcher read it thoroughly while listening to the audiotape of the dialogue to ensure final accuracy of the content, then several times more to gain a sense of what the interviewees were saying in their responses. After editing each transcript to remove all identifying information, the researcher submitted the completed transcripts along with the research questions, study design, and methodology to a professional coding service through an accredited graduate research company (Grad Coach) for initial coding (The researcher has a visual disability which made coding all the transcripts manually without assistance impossible.) The transcripts were manually coded by trained experts. The result was a very detailed Excel document with the codes/coding structure

for the six transcripts. The transcripts yielded a list of 1,507 codes (words and phrases). The researcher carefully reviewed the list of codes to familiarize herself with the content and context from which they were derived. The researcher then used the excel feature to alphabetize the list of codes, then copied and pasted the alphabetized list onto a new Excel spreadsheet. The sheet was divided into three columns: Codes, Frequency of occurrence, and Correlating Research Question (Clarke et al., 2019; Creswell, 2013; Saldaña, 2016).

The researcher continued the coding process by creating groups of similar codes according to their meaning (what they represented) as well as their relationship to research questions. Insignificant codes were set aside, and the process was repeated—combining and condensing related codes within and across groups to the point of saturation. The researcher identified themes relative to each of the four research questions from the emerging patterns.

Photovoice Analysis Procedures

With Photovoice, participants were involved in two significant activities that provided the basis for analysis of the visual data., the researcher asked participants to contextualize each image by writing a description about the image and its relevance to their experience. Then, during the photo-elicited interviews participants elaborated on these descriptions and selected five images they felt would articulate their experiences the most significantly.

The researcher reviewed the photographs in tandem with the field notes and transcripts generated from the photo-elicited conversations to become as familiar as possible with the images and the meaning they conveyed for participants. To help

facilitate this part of the process, the researcher created a chart for each set of photos and mounted them on a wall in her home. The researcher labeled each chart with a number assigned to the participant who took those photos. Then the researcher placed a handwritten label with the description the participant provided next to each image. The researcher looked for key words and phrases to see patterns among the photo descriptions. Similar words and phrases were circled with the same color marker across the charts (See Appendix E). After a thorough analysis of the captions, participant descriptions, and photo-elicited interview transcripts, the researcher created an Excel document listing the codes generated from this data. The Photovoice codes were analyzed using the same reflexive thematic method as the first interview data. After putting aside codes that were not purposeful to the aim of the study, the researcher grouped similar words and phrases (chunks of meaning) to the point of saturation, allowing the research questions to guide the coding process. The researcher identified themes that articulated the experiences of the principals in their day-to-day experience as related to the research questions. (Clarke et al., 2019; Creswell, 2013; Saldaña, 2016).

Since the photos were reflective of each participant's unique experiences, the researcher did not write a conclusive narrative based on the findings. The researcher synthesized the findings of the interview data and the results of the photo-elicited interviews to create a descriptive report representative of the meanings derived and the essences identified within the participants' unique experiences. The objective of such a report was to articulate the study findings by explaining what answers to the research questions were revealed and what, if any new information (or unexpected phenomenon) was discovered (Creswell, 2013; Saldaña, 2016). The researcher e-mailed participants a

copy of the report to study participants (except for two participants who retired following the first COVID-19 school year), and white data collection was still in progress.

Participants were given the opportunity to provide their feedback on the report via a return e-mail, or meeting on ZOOM. When two participants did not respond after two reminders, the researcher contacted them on their office number to make the request. The researcher used the feedback provided by study participants to further review the findings. The general response from the three participants who provided their feedback was that the report was adequate in describing their experiences (Saldaña, 2016).

Additionally, the researcher sent a “Thank you” card and a \$10.00 Starbucks gift card to each member of the study.

Each participant was provided a copy of the research report via school e-mail (Yin, 2014). All transcripts, notes, photographs, and other documents pertaining to this study are being kept in a locked file cabinet and on a password-protected laptop in the researcher’s home office where they will remain for a period of 36 months following the study, after which all information and documents will be permanently destroyed by the researcher (Creswell, 2013).

Ethical Considerations

Creswell (2012) emphasized the importance of consideration for ethical issues in qualitative research. This case study research involved direct interaction between the researcher and study participants, and thus the researcher adhered to all IRB guidelines regarding the protection of human subjects during research. Each participant was informed about the study’s purpose, goals, procedures, and how the study results would be reported and used. Participants signed a consent form and were assured that they could

elect to withdraw from the study at any point in the process if they chose to do so.

Participant identities were protected by using pseudonyms. Confidentiality of all data collected was maintained by keeping photographs and documents in a locked file cabinet in the researcher's home office where no other persons have access to them. Digital files have been kept on the researcher's password-protected laptop (Creswell, 2013).

Trustworthiness

Establishing trustworthiness is a critical aspect of securing the validity and plausibility of a research study (Glesne, 2010). In a qualitative study the researcher must consider these four areas: credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability (Yin, 2009). The researcher used a variety of strategies such as triangulation, prolonged engagement, and member checking to ensure the credibility of the research process and findings.

Triangulation of data is regarded as a foremost strategy to ensure trustworthiness in case study research. Triangulation involves the use of multiple types and sources of data (Creswell, 2012; Yin, 2014). The researcher used this strategy to help ensure the trustworthiness of the study by using multiple sources for data collection (interviews, field notes, Photovoice, and a photo-elicited interview). The researcher tested and revised the interview and Photovoice protocols before their actual implementation in the study through a pilot study.

The researcher demonstrated dependability through consistency in the application of the methodology with interview and Photovoice protocols and uniformity in the way all data were collected, interpreted, and stored. The study procedures were clearly outlined, and the research questions were stated as clear prepositions, and the data

collection process was managed in a consistent, methodical manner. This study design can be replicated for future study of this, or other similar phenomenon in education and other social fields. (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

The researcher established an audit trail to confirm the authenticity of the study results. Additionally, participants were asked to confirm the authenticity of the researcher's interpretation of the study data by providing feedback to the narrative created from the data analysis results (Creswell, 2013). The study findings from the interviews and Photovoice illustrated overlapping themes relative to the experiences of the participants within their roles as educational leaders and how these experiences were correlated to their perceived self- efficacy. These findings were highly reflective of the existing literature and can be indicative of the experiences of other educational leaders and those of leaders serving in similar, complex organizations.

Potential Research Bias

The researcher served as an elementary teacher for 34 years and has taught in the district where the study was conducted for 16 years. The researcher built close relationships with the eight principals she served under during her tenure as a teacher. Additionally, the researcher currently has more than six personal friends (and relatives) who are currently serving as principals in Florida and several others who are retired principals, or principals in other states. As a former elementary teacher and union steward, the researcher has firsthand experience with the drastic changes in the way teachers and principals are evaluated due to the implementation of the new evaluation system. It would have been unrealistic to disavow the inevitable biases and preconceptions that stem from these realities.

When a researcher is familiar with the subject of their study, or a part of the context of their research, he or she must be aware of the potential for interference from personal bias and have a plan to prevent such bias from interfering with the ability to maintain an objective focus throughout the research process (Yin, 2014). To approach the research with as little bias as possible, the researcher bracketed her perceptions and beliefs about the research topic by recording her thoughts and feelings in a journal. Throughout the data collection and analysis process, the researcher managed her bias through journaling, reflection, and consultation with peer researchers within her NSU cohort (Padgett, 2017; Saldaña, 2016).

Chapter 4: Findings

This chapter presents the findings from a qualitative case study that was designed to explore the perceived self-efficacy of elementary school principals within the context of their demanding leadership roles and to better understand their lived experiences and factors that influenced their perceived level of efficacy. The primary researcher used a reflexive thematic approach to analyze the data sets. This qualitative methodology permitted the researcher to develop a descriptive narrative of the meanings derived from the experiences of the study participants in response to the research questions that governed the study (Creswell, 2013). This chapter is divided into the following sections: (a) review of the research questions and interview protocol, (b) presentation of the findings, (c) narrative summary of the findings for each research question, and (d) the concluding summary.

Review of the Research Questions

The study was anchored by the following research questions:

1. How do elementary school principals in a large southeastern school district perceive their capabilities and level of self-efficacy for their position of school principal?
2. How have principals in a large southeastern school district adapted their leadership style to align with the performance requirements for their roles and responsibilities?
3. How do elementary principals in a large southeastern school district perceive the influences of professional training and professional relationships on their level of self-efficacy as a principal?
4. How have the lived experiences of these elementary principals contributed to

their perceived level of self-efficacy?

Presentation of the Findings

Data Analysis Results

Table 2 illustrates the themes that resulted from the interview and Photovoice data analysis as they relate to the research questions. The results for each research question will then follow, arranged by themes and the participants' quotes which drove the creation of those themes.

Table 2

Themes

Research Question	Themes
RQ1	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Principals must have high-level skill and abilities. 2. Principals need high levels of perceived self- efficacy
RQ2	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Prioritize time management to fulfill critical obligations 2. Leading with compassion fosters trust and a sense of community 3. Connecting with stakeholders builds collaborative relationships
RQ3	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Professional training programs greatly impacted job performance 2. Professional relationships increased perceived levels of self- efficacy
RQ4	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Leadership experiences both increase and decrease perceived levels of self- efficacy 2. Negative experiences can increase perceived self-efficacy levels

Summary of Findings: Research Question 1

How do elementary school principals in a large southeastern school district perceive their capabilities and level of self-efficacy for their position of school principal?

Themes from the data for this question were, principals possess high-level skill sets and abilities, and principals have high levels of perceived self-efficacy for their job.

A common thread among study participants was the definite need for principals to have specific skill sets, and a high level of self-efficacy to successfully fulfill their role as a principal. For example, each participant described the importance of having good interpersonal skills such as the ability to work well with diverse groups of people, build strong community relationships, and a positive school climate. Participant 1 shared the belief that "... competent and effective leaders have the right interpersonal skills to manage people ... be able to deal with many different personalities." Building relationships and a climate of acceptance was also important to participants.

Culture must be what you believe in and build around from that and being able to get other stakeholders' input into that so that you build a relationship of a community within your school. Each person has their own personality, so no one really can train you for dealing with others (Participant 3).

Another important aspect of leadership that participants felt was a critical, high-level skill they had mastered was planning and preparing for carrying out the diverse duties of instructional leadership which involves analyzing student data, staff meetings, professional development, and performing teacher evaluations. Participants 3, 4, and 6 expressed the importance of knowing the subject matter their students are expected to learn. All participants mentioned the importance of understanding how to use the teacher evaluation tools effectively and in a fair manner because teacher pay, and retention is linked to their evaluation scores. These expressions were in response to a direct question about their perceived self- efficacy for evaluating teachers. Additionally, strong

communication skills and leading with compassion were described as invaluable assets by Participants 1, 2, 3 and 6. Each of them articulated a high degree of perceived self-efficacy for their performance in these highlighted competencies. The following participant statement further illustrated this.

I'm comfortable with the evaluation system ... in how I use it and the feedback that I give teachers. I'm also mindful that everybody can continue to grow and learn. I choose to not use the tool as an 'I got you!' ... in some places I think it is used that way (Participant 6).

Moreover, the participants spoke about the importance of planning deliberately while making contingencies for possible barriers due to the increased demands on administrators and instructional staff. They spoke about the need to approach expectations for teachers with consideration and positivity. Every participant expressed high levels of perceived efficacy for their role as an instructional leader.

It was interesting to see that with Photovoice, each participant captured an image that included their office desk. Each unique perspective for the image reflected some aspect of a distinct, self-perceived leadership quality. "... my dual monitors and my 'in' and 'out' trays ... I'm always multi-tasking." (Participant 1).

Two participants captured several framed photos on their desk of people and places they hold dear, a beloved dog, and their "happy place," the beach. Participant 3 captured the faculty meeting agenda on her desk that represented planning for impact, which she perceived as a high-level skill, "We don't have meetings often and you only have their attention for a short time." Participant 4 spoke about the old desk itself but homed in on her ability to look past the poor condition of her office furniture and focus

on the task of empowering her staff, which she attributed to her perceived high self-efficacy in her leadership abilities. "... I didn't get new furniture but that's ok. That quote by Mandela on that wall above my desk reminds me of the power of education." Participant 6 chose two different images of her office desk. One captured the telephone and the other her laptop. "I live on my phone and laptop. Communication is important and it takes a lot of time. I get a ton of emails from the district..." These images reflected this participant's strong belief in her ability to find a way to manage the demands of the job.

Summary of Findings: Research Question 2

How have principals in a large southeastern school district adapted their leadership style to align with the performance requirements for their roles and responsibilities? Three significant themes were revealed in the data: Prioritize time management to fulfill critical obligations, lead with compassion to foster trust and a sense of community, and connect with stakeholders to build collaborative relationships.

The study participants articulated the need for a diverse range of skills to perform effectively—from instructional leaders who bear the responsibility for teacher and student performance to operations manager, they must have the knowledge, organizational skills, and confidence to perform their duties in each of the roles they play, and to bring together diverse personalities to create teams that can work cooperatively to fulfill the school's mission.

Prioritize Time Management to Fulfill Critical Expectations

When asked to describe their greatest challenges as a principal, each participant included at least one reference to time constraints. In many instances it was not the task at

hand that presented an issue. It was finding the adequate time to complete the requirement while attending to many other duties. For example, the district maintains a calendar for schools that identifies specific time frames (and deadlines) for conducting teacher evaluations, and grade level benchmark testing, and safety drills. Principals must adhere to those time constraints of face reprimands from their area director. They must be able to plan in a way that accommodates their school calendar of student activities as well as faculty meetings, PLC meetings, and data chats. Participant 1 described it as being a juggler and “trying to keep all of the balls in the air.” Participant 4 described the multitude of daily tasks as a weight, “There's enough managerial stuff that comes along with principalship that can bog you down daily.”

Participants disclosed that completing time-sensitive tasks in tandem with daily duties is a never-ending challenge and becoming successful in their efforts meant making time management a top priority. They have each adopted a personal way of operating where they do what is most important and most pressing before anything else. Many of them keep extended hours. They begin their day by opening the school and are there well after school hours. They try to plan ahead and delegate what duties they can to their assistant principal and support staff team to free up time for impromptu classroom visits and other interaction with students and staff. For example, Participants 3 and 5 said they can be found in the car loop talking to parents any afternoon when there are no meetings or other situations that need their attention.

Leading With Compassion Fosters Trust and a Sense of Community

All study participants relayed their belief that the role of an elementary principal is weighty. In other words, the job requires a lot of effort and personal sacrifice. During

their initial interview, participants were asked to define two of their primary roles, school administrator and instructional leader. While most provided details distinguishing the functions of the two roles, Participant 1 explained that he simply viewed himself as the leader of his school. They similarly attributed the weight of instructional leadership to the pressure of school grades based on test performance and district and state mandates. However, participants were also quick also acknowledged that the same pressure also impacts their teachers and staff who must work hard to ensure that performance goals are met by students. Challenges such as limited resources, inadequate support, and the overwhelming task of sifting through large amounts of district- generated information and curriculum resources with so little time for all that is required also has adverse influences on them and their staff. Participant 6 provided this example of her and her staff's frustrating experience,

As soon as our school grade came up to a C, all the resources and people that were coming in and out from the district and the state and everybody that was supposedly there to support all our efforts got pulled away. I was left to figure out how to keep the ship sailing.

Despite the challenges, participants passionately asserted their determination to lead well and to facilitate positive outcomes. That has meant stepping out of their comfort zone for some, and for others educating themselves to be more knowledgeable about systems and processes as well as becoming an advocate for their employees. For all, it has meant leading with a greater sense of compassion. As Participant 4 said, "...in times like this, you give people grace." Participant 1 echoed the sentiment,

The buck stops here, so when somebody on my team has been abused or feels run down by a situation or a task, they know they can say, 'I've hit a brick wall. I don't know where to go, help me.' We talk it through, give suggestions, refocus, and send them on their way.

Sometimes participants had to choose between doing what the district demanded or what was best for their school. The following example from Participant 4 illustrated such an instance.

Sometimes the district may mandate things and I must decide whether it's the right program for my school, even though it's been rolled out to every school. I've become more comfortable with filtering what my school will and won't participate in and justifying it to my boss in terms of why it doesn't work for my school or why it won't work at this time for us.

Participants displayed a strong belief in advocacy for their teachers and students and a determination to be engaged in all aspects of the educational processes at their school. They expressed the belief that their compassion and consideration for teachers and staff and their visibility to students is what has helped to create a culture of trust and unity. Participant 2 said the following,

I can't let all the weight of what expectations placed on building principals stop me from getting into classrooms or seeing my students. I've got to be in the classrooms. I've got to see my students. So very rarely do I sit at this desk.

The following participant statements highlighted their convictions on the type of leadership style that makes them feel they are doing the job well.

I try to inspire, empower, and support. That's my leadership style essentially.

because I don't have all the answers and if I make a mistake, I learn from it too. In the confines of following the rules I ask myself, 'How can we be innovative, have fun, and be creative?' We still must do all the components of the work, but let's make it enjoyable (Participant 5).

Even while leading at a high- performing school, Participant 6 felt there was always room for improvement.

I walked into a rock star situation with phenomenal teachers. There were no grade deficits at this school. They just needed polishing, and they've risen to the occasion. That's my greatest accomplishment to date as a principal ... that makes me feel great.

Connecting With Stakeholders Builds Collaborative Relationships

Another theme that was identified for Research Question 2 was that connecting with stakeholders is an important part of building collaborative relationships among staff and between the schools and their communities. The subjects spoke of their efforts to build positive relationships with teachers and staff, students, parents, and the community in which they serve. They perceived that the strength of those relationships were effective predictors for the success of their school. Participant 6 expressed this belief, "All of my people are important to me. I treat everyone— the custodians, cafeteria workers, and teacher with the same level of respect."

Along with their words, the postures and gestures of the participants during the interviews appeared to convey their sincerity about their passion and dedication to their school and community. Some clasped their hands or leaned towards the researcher as they spoke about their relationships with various stakeholders. Principal 1 made direct

eye contact with the researcher and asserted, “What I want for my personal child is what I want for the 740 children in this building.” This participant also shared some of their difficulties associated with low parental involvement, describing it as frustrating, and an on- going challenge. He described parental involvement as “a critical part of student success.” Several other participants shared their commitment to finding ways to connect with parents and the community at large. Principal 6 professed, “I am the face of my school. I’m the advocate and public representative.”

Regarding a partnership with a community organization that provides rehabilitation services for the community, Principal 5 avowed, “We’re a school that supports our community, and our community supports our school.” Participant 5 expounded on the need to connect with students,

I think my kids knowing me, and knowing I learned their names ... that's real important ... they need to know I know who they are. And I know most of their parents, I might not remember their parents' names, but I can say, you're Johnny's mom, you know.

Participant 2 shared her position on securing the well- being of staff and students, for students and staff,

If you're not happy going into work ... if I have a child that's not happy coming into school, I must find out why, because they're not going to learn if they're unhappy Is it us or is it something at home? If it's something at home, how can we help with that or help the parents with that?

Principal 4 captured an image of a pair of well-worn tennis shoes. She explained that she wears comfortable shoes because she is constantly on the move. “I’m in every classroom every day.”

Principal 3’s image of the parent pick-up loop represented a place for connecting with the parents. “I am out here every afternoon that I can, and it’s a joy to see and talk with the parents.” Other principals expressed similar sentiments. It was evident from the data that connecting with all stakeholders in a positive and consistent way was of the utmost importance to each of them and that their style of leadership was intended to maintain and expand such connections.

Summary of Findings: Research Question 3

How do elementary principals in a large southeastern school district view the influence of professional training and professional relationships on their perceived level of self-efficacy as a principal? Two overarching themes for this research question were that professional training programs greatly impacted their job performance, and professional relationships increased their perceived level of self- efficacy for the role of educational leadership.

Professional Training Programs Greatly Impact Performance

In Section 3 of the interview protocols participants were asked to describe the kind of preparatory training they received to become a principal, whether they believed this training was adequate, and the influence of these programs on their perceived sense of efficacy. Most of the participants described the preparatory training as good, adequate, and valuable. They intimated that they would not have had the knowledge and skills to lead with confidence without the preparatory training and support they received.

Participant 3 admitted,

Without the professional development, I think we would have much less consistency in the district on how programs are used, whether it's the teacher evaluation tool, how we conduct our safety and security and our drills, all those things. The professional development behind them is critical to make sure that some aspects remain consistent across the district.

Participant 5 made a similar claim,

Learning on the job would have been much more difficult without having an opportunity to practice certain skills before assuming the job. And even the first year, there was guidance on a lot of things that we may not have covered in the intern program.

All participants expressed their belief that they had a high level of perceived self-efficacy for job functions like teacher evaluation, data analysis, and planning and monitoring instruction and student learning. However, the more experienced principals cited differences in principal preparation and development training in recent years compared to the more “complete” training they received when they were becoming principals that prepared them more equitably for instructional practice and operations management responsibilities. These individuals expressed a higher level of perceived self- efficacy for performance in operational areas like managing the school’s budget.

I feel my training in professional development was very helpful, I do think there's a gap now for leaders, especially along the way. I just don't think we have the same training; they [district] got too far into instructional. Instructional practice is important, but the building comes with it (Participant 6).

Nowadays, they don't have as much of the operational pieces because Broward moved away from that, and some of the people over the years are being demoted or losing their jobs or getting in trouble because they don't know how to balance a budget, or they don't know how to look for property inventory (Participant 2).

Participant 1 echoed those claims,

Broward went full swing into instructional leadership and, 'This is what you guys are going to do,' They forgot that, well, there's a building around you you're still responsible for, because that didn't go away.

Participants alluded to the preparatory training, professional development, and support through mentorship programs as foundational parts of their high level of efficacy in their ability to do their job well and make a difference every day that they lead.

Professional Relationships Increase Perceived Levels of Self- Efficacy

It was apparent from the interviews that the study subjects do not rely entirely on district programs to help them achieve and maintain success in leadership. Personal effort and mutually supportive relationships with other principals and mentors were regarded as paramount to successfully navigate the demands of the job— especially during times that made them question their ability to continue. Each participant shared at least one example in which a peer or mentor provided them support, knowledge, or inspiration that motivated them to rise to own the responsibility and find, or create solutions that led to a positive outcome.

You vent, and then you get back to work ... figure out how to make the

round peg fit in the square hole ... somebody that can just encourage you that it's going to be okay ... someone that can share resources with you ... you don't know what to do or you don't have the material to do it (Participant 4).

Overcoming obstacles and experiencing success with the help and encouragement of their professional network gave them an increased sense of self-efficacy. Participant 1 credited his perceived high level of self-efficacy to his relationship with a veteran principal.

I learned more on how to become an effective administrator from talking to high performing administrators that were doing the job every day and from talking to retirees as well.

Study subjects spoke extensively about their relationships with other principals. The veteran principals in this study explained how they befriended new administrators within their cadre to offer support and encouragement. These relationships were described as invaluable especially for helping the novice principals through difficult times. Participant 1 spoke of a closely knit group of principals of which he is now a part. The group encourages one another and shares best practices,

I have a group of principal friends now that were, in my opinion, all highly effective leaders, and we all do things very similarly, but we also tailor it to the type of schools we're at and the staff that we have. It would have helped in other situations where I sometimes felt like I was on an island.

Summary of Findings: Research Question 4

How have the lived experiences of these elementary principals contributed to their perceived level of self-efficacy? The following themes were articulated in the data:

leadership experiences both increase and decrease the perceived self- efficacy levels of participants, and negative experiences can force leaders into actions that increases their perceived self-efficacy levels. At the time of data collection educators in the district were attempting to perambulate the fallout from a mass shooting. COVID brought a temporary halt to data collection and when the research resumed a year later, the participants were facing increased demands for school security and health safety. Although they mentioned typical issues such as staff concerns, irate parents, and custodial problems, they were most vocal about security and school safety and how they were (and continue to be) affected by the pressures from state and district requirements in these areas.

Lived Experiences Increase and Decrease Perceived Self-Efficacy

In the aftermath of a school shooting that garnered national attention, and during a pandemic that changed the format for how public education is delivered, participants confessed they sometimes questioned their ability to do their job under such duress. When discussing their lived experiences within this context, they shared moments when both difficulties and successes played a part in elevating or diminishing their perceived sense of self- efficacy levels. In addition to the challenges of implementing and managing additional safety and security measures such as planning and executing schoolwide active shooter drills and then online instruction for elementary students (a first for the district), principals were still accountable for student performance on state-mandated standardized tests. “There was a level of adapting to this new concept of being a virtual principal. There was no time to learn. We just had to do it right” (Participant 3).

“We had to just jump in and do it just like our teachers. I had to take all the

structures I had in place and just repackage everything for the virtual world just like my teachers did” (Participant 6). “I didn’t know how I would survive this year and a half because of everything we were tasked to do as principals in this COVID year” (Participant 4).

For those participants, the temporary yet often significant decrease in their perceived self- efficacy was outweighed by the increase in perceived levels of efficacy once they found and implemented solutions or made it past obstacles. Others claimed to bolster themselves by continuing to believe in who they are as a leader and by maintaining high expectations for themselves. “I show up for the folks in my building and for the community I serve. I don’t show up for this job to impress anybody because I know my ability. I’m not questioning whether I can do this job” (Participant 5).

Participant 2 was equally assertive about their high level of perceived self- efficacy, “I don’t really need affirmation from anybody. I don’t need validation because I know that I only operate from positive intent.”

In the period following the mass shooting and at the onset of the COVID pandemic, measures taken by the state and school district were described by the participants as extreme, unrealistic, overwhelming, and humanly impossible. The lived experiences of participants during that time especially, lowered their morale in varying degrees and at times, directly contributed to decreasing their perceived level of self- efficacy. One participant’s Photovoice data included an image of a district proposal to arm school administrators. The proposal was eventually abandoned as it was met with great resistance. This participant’s sentiments articulated the perspective of all the participants on the matter.

They were really talking about principals and APs being armed. They talked about army teachers. I had teachers go, ‘Well, I’m happy to carry one when they’re ready.’ I’m like, ‘The day you start getting a gun, I’m out the door because we don’t need them in here. We just don’t (Participant 5).’

The following participant statements attest to the weight of their job requirements during that time. “The stress is unbelievable because you have all of these people that you’re responsible for” (Participant 3). “When the work becomes burdensome, I get short with my family and then I have to rewind and say, ‘They don’t deserve that.’ I do a lot of reflecting” (Participant 6). “After just 2 months on the job, the mass shooting happened in our district and that in and of itself was a challenge because it was safety, safety all the time” (Participant 1).

A common concern at the time of the study was how time spent on safety protocols was taking away from instructional time and student learning. As instructional leaders, participants worried about being able to facilitate favorable (or previously held) levels of student achievement. Since their school grade and their personal performance is substantially rated according to student achievement, they felt the prospect of good performance outcomes was low. This belief also contributed to lower levels of perceived self-efficacy. “So what happens now is the majority of our day is tied to behavior threat assessments (which are things we should be focused on), but it takes away from our core mission of teaching and learning” (Participant 2). Participant 1 concurred:

We really don’t have the resources to chase all these things down and get into the classroom to make sure kids are learning and teach to educate my kids and help

teachers to receive their appropriate professional development, et cetera, on top of quarantining classrooms, contact tracing, et cetera.

Participants intimated that when resources were hard to obtain, or unattainable and when despite their best efforts, student scores dropped and lowered the school rating, their level of efficacy also dropped—if only temporarily. It's not about the scores right now. It's about getting the ship to sail because this is the Titanic and it's sinking right now. We got to get everybody back on the ship and get the ship turned and going in the right direction. Then you can start measuring how fast and how far we're going. Despite the stress and personal sacrifices, the principals also enunciated their commitment to their position as the leader of their school. They used the new challenges surrounding virtual and blended instruction and safety and security to learn additional skills, establish and broaden relationships, and strengthen their resolve to continue leading with excellence. The circumstances that at times made them doubt their ability also pushed them to challenge themselves to do more. They explained that each small success helped them to believe they could keep going. In essence, every win amid the discomfort and press to reach critical expectations served to build up their confidence and boost their perceived levels of self-efficacy. The following example from Participant 2 is an example of such. COVID taught me it's okay to ask for help ... I was solitary in the sense of the virtual, but I also had colleagues that were going through the same mental and emotional challenges. We built a little core group (Participant 2).

Participants also used their Photovoice images to share aspects of how their lived experiences affected their self-efficacy. Participant 5 described a photo of the school garden as a place that gives her joy and a sense of accomplishment which added to her

perceived level of self- efficacy. Our kids are learning about the environment and applying things they learn. They really enjoy the gardens. The teachers love it too. As you can see, we have benches and chairs out here. They sometimes come sit here to have lunch.

In contrast, Participant 6's narrative about the school laptop in the dim lamplight on her desk emoted how lonely the job is. "I am surrounded by so many people all day, but I often feel so alone ... everything rests on my shoulders." Admittedly, there are times when the loneliness of leadership lowered this participant's perceived level of self- efficacy.

Negative Experiences Can Increase Perceived Levels of Self- Efficacy

Despite the challenges of the pandemic, the participants intimated that they learned valuable lessons about their role and themselves as a person because of it. They spoke of having to "dig deep" into themselves to find abilities and strength they were unaware they had before, because their job performance required it. They managed to successfully traverse the pandemic fallout which ultimately increased their perceived sense of self- efficacy. The stringent requirements associated with school security were taxing. However, study participants articulated personal perspectives that indicated a willingness to do whatever was necessary to keep their school safe. This statement was reflective of their sentiments,

I was always conscious of safety and security ... you're giving me your children, and I have my staff there all day, I want to protect them ... our doors were locked in our classrooms long before the [mass shooting]. We have various progress- monitoring tools in place to make sure we're tracking our students ... that's still

the most important thing, to make sure our kids are receiving a world class education *and* being safe (Participant 3).

Additionally, the principals in this study expressed high levels of perceived self-efficacy in their current role as school leader as evidenced by the responses to questions about their level of confidence in doing their job in operations, teacher evaluations, and instructional leadership. Such confidence is based on systems they have implemented within their school to monitor student progress, use data to drive instruction, and provide support and professional development for their teachers and staff. Some of these systems were developed in response to low student achievement and other negative factors.

Participant 4 gave this example,

When we receive our latest data points, we have those data chats, and then we have conversations with teachers to inquire about next steps and how to make instruction shift to meet the needs of their students based on the current data.

Another area that spoke to this research question was when participants were tasked with switching the delivery of student instruction to a completely virtual platform in response to the COVID pandemic. None of the participants had taught virtually, and none had ever supervised virtual instruction for an entire school. To guide the transition from traditional, in-person to virtual classrooms was a huge and intimidating undertaking. It required them to help create and implement technology systems for student learning, communication, school operations, and continued instructional leadership on their part. Some participants acknowledged the terror they felt because they were not technology experts, while others narrated the struggles they encountered while

trying to guide and encourage teachers who lacked the skills and confidence to teach from a virtual delivery system.

Participants said their position forced them to seek out support and ways to do their job at the same level they had prior to the pandemic. This included maintaining high expectations for themselves and reasonable expectations for staff and students. “The same skill sets applied in the virtual world; think about your people; give them what they need, support them. Some teachers pivoted quite naturally to online, but some teachers couldn't- without help, they couldn't have done it” (Participant 6).

Furthermore, they established that their willingness to own their responsibilities and do what was necessary to endure and achieve some measure of success. Finding solutions, and availing themselves to their staff, students, and community helped to build up their perceived level of efficacy within a context that could have greatly lowered, or even destroyed it. Participant 1’s statement is an effective summation of their combined perspectives. “We can’t wait for Superman, so we must figure it out ourselves” (Participant 1).

Concluding Summary of Findings

In this chapter, the primary researcher presented the findings of a qualitative case study that explored the perceived self-efficacy of elementary principals in the second largest school district in the southeastern region of the United States. An overview of the research methodology and the findings from the interview and Photovoice data were explained. The research was guided by four overarching questions relative to educational leadership and self-efficacy. The findings of the study were explained according to the research question they answered.

Through reflexive, thematic analysis of the data the researcher was able to deduce the following themes that were described by the researcher: (a) principals possess high-level skill sets and abilities, (b) principals have a high level of perceived self-efficacy, (c) prioritize time management to fulfill critical obligations, (d) leading with compassion and flexibility fosters trust and a sense of community, (e) connect with stakeholders to build collaborative relationships, (f) professional training programs greatly impact job performance, (g) professional relationships increase perceived levels of self-efficacy, (h) leadership experiences both increase and decrease perceived levels of self-efficacy, and (i) negative experiences can increase perceived self-efficacy levels. These themes will be the basis for the discussion about the study findings in Chapter 5 as well as possible implications, applications, and recommendations for future research on this phenomenon.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Introduction

In recent years, political perspectives, public opinion, cultural climate, and natural disaster have all helped to shape the evolution of public education delivery and management in America. The position of school principal has become a central point of focus as they are the ones held most accountable for teacher performance and student achievement (Viloria, 2019; Wiczorek et al., 2019). As the job of school principal has changed and expanded to encompass increasingly complex and diverse responsibilities, the pressure to perform with efficiency has also increased. The central question the researcher endeavored to answer was, how prepared are today's principals to meet newly reformed performance expectations? This study of a select group of elementary school principals in a large school district in the southeastern United States aimed to explore and better understand the self-efficacy of principals and how they have adapted to accommodate job expectations within the context of their complex role. The study was anchored by four questions that guided the research procedures and analysis of the data.

Findings and Interpretation

Research Question 1

Study participants were asked to share their opinions about the skills and capabilities needed to perform the demanding requirements of their job, and their perceived level of personal efficacy in those areas. Study results revealed the principals believed they have high-level (specific skills) as well as a strong personal sense of self-efficacy and these critical for successful outcomes in educational leadership.

Principalship Requires High-Level Skill Sets and Leadership Abilities

Study participants equally emphasized that the complexity of their dual position as administrator and instructional leader required a broad spectrum of higher-level abilities. For example, all participants claimed to have outstanding interpersonal skills that includes the ability to build strong relationships of trust with stakeholders. They also spoke of the skills needed to manage diverse groups of people, effectively communicate the school vision, and listen and provide solutions for staff and parents. Additionally, participants highlighted the critical role of adequate training for operations management tasks like allocating school funds, monitoring inventory, hiring staff, and overseeing the maintenance of the school building. This includes knowledge about the functions of the school and its systems as well as the ability to recognize needs as well as having the confidence to act from personal discernment in any given situation. While five of the six participants expressed high levels of perceived self-efficacy in all these areas, one participant admitted that the school budget was initially their greatest obstacle and although they are much more confident now, their perceived level of efficacy is not yet where they would like it to be.

Likewise, participants expressed the belief that, as instructional leaders, they are knowledgeable about curriculum content, interpreting and managing student data, and using student data to drive instruction. They were also highly confident in using the district's performance evaluation system to rate teacher performance. They regarded themselves as possessing a high level of innate leadership abilities that have been cultivated and refined through professional learning and leadership experiences throughout their career as educators and educational leaders.

The participants' perceptions about capabilities and skill sets they have, and their strong sense of perceived self- efficacy was comparable to the literature on this subject. Exemplary school administrators cultivate a climate that is fruitful, build learning-focused, collaborative relationships, and are intentional and precise in their management (Acton, 2021; Grissom et al., 2021). Moreover, previous studies have established that beyond leadership style, it is their knowledge (ability), and confidence that makes an educational leader most efficient (Houchens et al., 2017; Kim, 2020; McBrayer et al., 2018).

Principals Must Have a High Level of Perceived Self- Efficacy

The study findings illustrated the how the participants demonstrated high levels of perceived self- efficacy even when dealing with fear and adverse situations. Participants confirmed that the determining factor in overcoming adversity, and the motivation to face challenges head- on was belief in their ability to do so. In essence, they came into their leadership position with a high level of perceived self- efficacy. They shared the belief that nature of educational leadership requires a high level of confidence in oneself and in one's ability to handle the difficulties and demands of the job.

According to Barling and Beattie (1983), self-efficacy is a person's perception about their ability to complete a specific task. A study by Bandura and Bailey (1990) confirmed a relationship between the individual's perceived self-efficacy, their goals, and the performance outcomes of their organization. The findings for Research Question 1 suggested that these participant's' strong belief in their ability to do the performance tasks required by their organization, has resulted in good performance outcomes for their schools.

Research Question 2

Questions in part two of the interview protocol were designed to elicit answers for how the principals had adjusted their leadership style to meet the state and school district's performance requirements for their job. Three major themes were derived from the data, prioritize time management to fulfill critical obligations, leading with compassion and flexibility fosters trust and a sense of community, and connecting with stakeholders builds collaborative relationships.

Prioritize Time Management to Fulfill Critical Obligations

The study subjects described the complexity of fulfilling multiple leadership roles while serving in one position, and the critical nature of each. A problem that was unanimously articulated was the lack of time they had to meet all the demands. Participants described their days as starting early (almost always arriving before everyone else), multi-tasking all day to complete various duties, and staying after hours to read and respond to emails, make, and return calls, address custodial issues, and planning. Participants claimed they have adjusted their leadership style (and personal lives) to accommodate the requirements of the job. Learning ways to make the best use of the time they had available was sometime each participant avowed was paramount to meeting deadlines and addressing the most pressing issues in a timely and efficient way.

The Photovoice data also reflected the pressure of leadership relative to time. For one participant captured an image of trays labeled 'in' and 'out' on their desk. The image of these office trays represented the constant flow of paperwork that required attention and the stress of trying to keep the contents of the 'out' basket higher than that of the 'in'

basket while juggling other duties and time-sensitive matters. Another participant's image of a partly- consumed smoothie being symbolized the non-stop pace of a typical school day, how they are constantly on the move and rarely have enough time to eat anything on most days.

Previous research discerned similar findings, that educational leadership demands relative to time such as the daily work pace, long days, limited amount of time for meeting obligations like meetings, staff development and complying with deadlines on the district calendar (like safety drills and teacher evaluations) are all factors over which they have little autonomy (Denecker, 2019). Their success requires careful planning and wise allocation of their time. These studies also confirmed the link between time constraints and negative emotions for principals. Unattainable time constraints can lead to principals feeling overwhelmed and insecure. Such negative emotions have an unfavorable effect on their wellness and subsequently, on the school they serve (Hochbein et al., 2021; McBrayer et al., 2018; Wang et al., 2023).

Lead With Compassion and Flexibility to Facilitate Trust and a Sense of Community

Participants said being an instructional leader requires excellent time management as well as specific knowledge and skills. For example, to become more adept at monitoring instruction and student progress, participants had to deepen their understanding of how to use student data. As data manager for their school, they must provide support and professional development for teachers as well as model how data must be used to drive teaching and learning. This is an aspect of instructional leadership that has gained traction in recent years as pressure for higher performance on standardized tests has become a major district goal. Participants shared ongoing

challenges with teachers who still lack the competence to analyze and use their student data, and those who are unwilling to do so with fidelity. Each has made it a school-wide priority and take time to mentor and assist those in need of this support.

These participants expressed a high regard for their teachers and staff. When sharing their difficulties, they also share the interventions they have put in place to help circumvent frustration and low performance. They spoke of maintaining an “open door” office policy before and after school hours where teachers and staff can stop by to talk in a space where there is no judgment. They believe their transparency and compassion as a leader has resulted in trust and a greater sense of unity as a school community. They explained their awareness that how they lead translates into how teachers and students perform, and that when their teachers feel safe, respected, and appreciated, they expectations for performance outcomes are better and they perform from a higher perceived level of self-efficacy.

Participants further intimated that good leadership is considering the well-being of teachers, staff, and students— even to the extent of placing the perceived needs of their school above district directives. Hoque and Raya’s (2022) study on leadership style confirmed this belief claiming that successful leaders adapt a style of leadership that promotes favorable relationships with their teachers. In addition, it is important that principals consider the emotional needs of teachers because their emotional state directly affects the classroom environment and student learning. This advocacy and flexible manner of leading showed the participants’ ability to adapt their approach to best meet the needs of their school within the context of district requirements demonstrated their versatility and dedication to maintaining relationships of trust within their school

community. This ability to lead from contextual awareness suggested a strong correlation to the research of Norman and Gurr (2020) which concluded that good leadership is highly contextual in nature. The researchers argued that the degree of success experienced by educational leaders is contingent on the way leaders adjust their methods in response to circumstances and issues within the context. Clarke and O'Donoghue (as cited by Normann & Gurr, 2020) defined this context as the organizational and environmental setting of the educational institution.

When faced with the task of guiding their teachers through the transition to the virtual school platform, study participants shared how they found new ways to communicate with teachers that included weekly affirmations and technical support. They were flexible in expectations for staff who had sick family members or had lost loved ones. However, they maintained a reasonable standard for performance and expected staff to do their jobs consistently and efficiently and modeled these expectations. Norman and Gurr (2020) further argued that while there are always a variety of cultural contexts influencing the school, successful school leaders lead in a way that creates a sense of balance between these contexts that results in “an inclusive, multicultural” environment, and while being conscious of culture, not “constrained by context.”

Connecting With Stakeholders Builds Collaborative Relationships

Previous studies underscored the establishment of productive and collaborative relationships between principals and teachers as imperative to the realization of organizational goals. The effect of supportive instructional leadership that includes teacher input as part of a collaborative process has been proven to affect the collective

efficacy of teachers (Goddard et al., 2021). Furthermore, the leader's ability to identify with members of the school community through equity leadership and acceptance is vital to the organization (Grissom et al., 2020).

In their responses, study participants readily acknowledged their aspirations towards a shared vision, teamwork, equity, and a family atmosphere within their school community and stressed the importance of building good relationships with all stakeholders. One principal at a large school in an urban neighborhood where single-parent homes are the norm due to alcohol and drug addiction and high incarceration rates found a way to make the school a community resource center for parents seeking help for addiction recovery. Principal 4 spoke of how bringing the support staff and teachers together to help find a creative way to boost parental involvement in school activities has drawn parents and family members into the school family nights. Because of this collaborative effort, parental involvement increased from only six parents when she became principal to the now overcrowded hallways on school event nights.

Another participant regarded changing the school culture from one that marginalized certain ethnic groups to one where all ethnicities are made to feel welcome as one of their greatest achievements. It was also evident from the data that collaborative leadership that included teachers, staff, other administrators, and community representatives was a priority for the participants (Grissom et al., 2021; Thomas-El et al., 2020).

Research Question 3

Participants were asked to share how professional training and development and

professional relationships have influenced their self-efficacy as a principal. Interview questions about training included questions about their training to become a principal as well as training received after assuming the role. The responses revealed two prominent themes, principal training programs greatly impact job performance, and professional relationships increase perceived levels of self-efficacy.

Principal Training Programs Greatly Impact Job Performance

This theme corresponded with studies that emphasized the need for principal training prior to them taking office, and ongoing mentorship and professional development for sitting principals (Kim & Lowery, 2020; Levin et al., 2020). Participants attributed their ability to act efficiently in both their administrative and instructional leadership roles—especially for more complex duties like overseeing all aspects of the school budget, evaluating teachers, and monitoring student performance using data to their training. Several participants acknowledged that without the training before assuming the job, their experience would have been very different, and they likely would not have survived their first year on the job.

On the other hand, participants shared frustration about deficiencies in the training and the lack of support after the first year that also impacted their performance. While the principals described the district preparation program as satisfactory overall, a few suggested that the training itself was not enough preparation for all the operational demands, particularly the school budget. The more senior principals also noted that because the district was so laser focused on instructional leadership and standardized tests performance outcomes, that the newer principals are not receiving the same level of training they received for the operational components of the job.

Bandura (1977) contended that when people experience success through mastery of a task or skill, it has the greatest influence on self-efficacy. Likewise, when people experience failures before efficacy has been sufficiently established, this can undermine future success. He further asserted that the encouragement received during personal coaching and mentorship could provide the kind of self-assurance necessary to conquer feelings of anxiety and inadequacy that restrict one's ability to push ahead until success is reached (Bandura, 1982). Study participants who were veteran principals expressed a greater degree of perceived self- efficacy regarding performance on operational areas like managing the school budget. They credited the training they received for providing them with the knowledge and hands- on experience they needed to be successful in this area. Less experienced participants referred to managing the school budget as an area for further development except for one participant who credited their high level of perceived self- efficacy in school finances (and generally-speaking) to the mentorship of an older and very experienced school principal. The mentorship component of the district's principal preparation program was described by participants as invaluable and very helpful. The data indicated a general satisfaction with the program from all participants.

The analysis of the data concerning principal preparation also led to an interesting and unexpected discovery. Although every school had students with some degree of exceptionality (as briefly mentioned in the context of student testing and test scores), and participants spoke about concerns for all students, closing achievement gaps, and equity, only one of the six principals in this study spoke directly about special education students and inclusion efforts at their school. The principal talked about interacting with students in the school's autism cluster and the many efforts that have been made to accommodate

them, make them feel like they belong and support their parents and families. This principal admitted she knew very little about autism and special needs students when they became the principal of a school that was home to a large special needs group of children.

The fact that five of six principals did not mention inclusion-related equity, or instructional leadership efforts and responsibilities specifically relevant to special education was concerning. Moreover, the single participant who was aware of the needs of exceptional students and the rules about inclusion (ESSA) admitted that her knowledge was solely from on-the-job experiences and her taking the initiative to pursue that knowledge. This unexpected finding does not mean that those five participants are ignorant of special education laws or failing to satisfy the needs of their exceptional education students, however it could be an indication that specialized training and additional resources are needed in this area. It could also mean that the district's intense focus on student achievement and the accompanying pressure on principals may cause them to see exceptional education as secondary to the more consequential task of maintaining or increasing the test scores of regular education students so their school can be rated within an acceptable range.

This finding suggested a similarity to the findings of several studies that explored the perceptions and attitudes of principals and exceptional education. The studies reported that many principals are unfamiliar with special education law and policies and indicated a need for more training on special education and diversity in principal preparation programs to ensure principals are equipped to address the needs of all students in accordance with federal requirements (Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015; Sun & Yin, 2020; White et al., 2021).

Professional Relationships Increase Perceived Self- Efficacy Levels

Relationships, the way one interacts with others within an organization, also influence self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is an internal, personal rating of one's ability to adequately do a particular task. When a task is hard, the relating self-efficacy increases the amount of effort and determination the person puts out to complete the task and this increases the likelihood of their success (Bandura & Beattie, 1983). According to Redmond (2010), efficacy alone does not determine success or failure. The person's performance outcome expectations (deciding whether the knowledge applied to past situations will work for this new challenge) also plays a part. In addition, persons who have done well in the past and were rewarded in some way (an award, verbal praise, a good evaluation, merit pay) for doing a good job experience increased self-efficacy (Redmond, 2010).

This study's findings seemed to further illustrate the ideology of self- efficacy regarding how positive relationships and feedback from peers and superiors in the form of affirmation, acceptance and empathy contributed to the self-efficacy of principals when faced with difficult tasks (Bandura & Beattie, 1983). Participants shared how strong peer relationships helped to sustain them and the relationships with cadre leaders and mentors they turn to for help when they are in need. These professional relationships have played a big role in helping them to maintain a high level of perceived self-efficacy, and more importantly, the support and encouragement has served to raise the participants' perceived levels of efficacy during times when they felt inadequate or were on the verge of giving up. Study participants shared examples of instances when input from professional relationships inspired them, stretched their worldview, and challenged

them to do more. One participant confessed that the regular interaction with other principals during cadre meetings has helped to make him a better leader. Sharing best practices and hearing the innovative activities happening at other schools were inspiring and motivating.

The study findings for Research Question 3 also suggested that a benefits of having relationships of mutual respect and trust with other principals increased perceived self- efficacy. Participants called on other principals when unsure about a decision they needed to make, to share small victories, to vent, and to encourage one another. Participants 4 and 6 talked about befriending new cadre members and looking out for novice principals. Participant 1 spoke of the toll the position can take on the emotions and how on several occasions he had to convince fellow administrators not to give up. Participants maintained their job has changed dramatically since the Stoneman-Douglas mass shooting. Sharing their challenges with other leaders and receiving encouragement and support helped to bolster, and at times increase their perceived self- efficacy because they had the security of knowing they were not alone, others faced the same obstacles. They had the support of their professional community.

Their experiences further suggested a correlation to Bandura's (1977) findings on the effect of verbal persuasion on self- efficacy. Bandura concluded that verbal persuasion alone is not enough to produce a perpetual sense of efficacy, rather verbal persuasion along with support and the necessary tools to succeed are what creates efficacy that is more likely to endure. While the researcher's review of the literature did not yield findings about principals' professional relationships with colleagues and superiors in isolation, discussions about the relationship between their perceived self-

efficacy in response to feedback from their performance outcomes and the performance of teachers (as well as relationships with teachers) abound. The studies show that professional relationships have a bearing on successful school leadership and that exemplary leaders build productive vertical and horizontal relationships with all stakeholders (Houchens et al., 2017; Homer & Westberry, 2022; Justus, et al., 2023).

Research Question 4

The findings for this research question spoke to how the lived experiences of the participating principals influenced their self-efficacy in both positive and adverse ways. The data also suggested that negative experiences can lead to increased perceived self-efficacy as the individual responds to those experiences by taking measures to overcome the difficulty. Subjects shared some of the effects of their lived experiences in the interviews and through the essences captured in their Photovoice images. Their experiences within the context of educational leadership both increased and diminished their perceived self-efficacy according to the nature of the circumstances and their perceptions about the outcomes.

According to Bandura (1977) and Redmond (2010), the negative emotions that manifest in response to very difficult or stressful circumstances, is a type of feedback that can gauge how the person will handle the problem (or if they will avoid dealing with it altogether). Extremely elevated levels of stress-related emotions like anxiety can destroy self-efficacy or drastically reduce it. Two key findings were deduced from the data for this final research question, safety and security are added leadership challenges, and leadership experiences affect efficacy. Both findings were highly reflective of Bandura and other experts' assertions regarding how self-efficacy is shaped and influenced.

Leadership Experiences Both Increase and Decrease Perceived Self- Efficacy Levels

In the aftermath of the Stoneman-Douglas shooting, participants struggled to process what had happened while adjusting schedules, school safety plans, and professional development focus to accommodate demands for faculty and student training on safety procedures such as active shooter drills. Participants said it was stressful and described some of the new protocols as extreme and virtually impossible to accommodate. One participant argued that while school safety is important, such extreme measures are counterproductive and even harmful to the school's mission, and that research shows a very small likelihood of such an event occurring again.

When the COVID pandemic hit, the participants became virtual instructional leaders forced to supervise distribution of technology resources to students, plan and manage the implementation and maintenance of virtual educational delivery with little to no experience with such specialized duties. Each participant said they had moments when they questioned their ability to do what was required. In schools that offered blended instruction before school closures, participants had to field requests and make decisions as to which teachers would report to school and who would facilitate distance learning remotely. This task was described as very difficult and stressful because everyone wanted to stay at home.

Participants confided they were very concerned about their health of that of their staff and students. Some lost loved ones and everyone knew someone who did. They also expressed they were especially concerned for students when schools closed—particularly about isolation and lack of care for students who did not have ideal circumstances at

home. Another major concern for participants was, how students would perform after such a disruption in the learning process. Lack of resources and manpower were also factors that made participants feel inundated and doubtful about their leadership capabilities during the pandemic. The circumstances within this context caused their previously high levels of perceived self- efficacy to fluctuate in response to situations from day-to-day.

The concerns and uncertainty of the study participants during times of crisis pointed to similarities with findings of previous studies about educational leadership in times of a crisis like COVID-19. Principals in these studies also faced challenges with adhering to required protocols like contact tracing due to the sheer magnitude of such an endeavor (especially in larger schools). Limited resources and manpower, and lack of preparedness were also factors that contributed to their anxiety and stress (Azukas, 2022; Diliberti et al., 2022; MacGillis, 2023; Rochester & Sanders, 2023). However, the experiences of these BCPS participants were unique in that they were already stressed and overwhelmed with changes from the fallout of the mass shooting in their district when they were faced with the issues caused by COVID-19. A study participant described them as two tectonic events that reduced or redefined their role from principals to security specialists.

Negative Experiences Can Increase Perceived Self- Efficacy

Study participants shared a variety of leadership experiences that included challenges and successes. When they were able to implement solutions that solved a problem or helped to improve a situation, they felt they had done their job and showed effective leadership ability which caused them to maintain a high level of perceived self-

efficacy. For example, when student data showed learning gains, they believed they were on track to perform well on state tests. As Bandura (1977) claimed, these mastery experiences increased or helped to maintain the individual's sense of efficacy.

The findings for this research question also suggested that because these participants began their careers as principals with a high level of perceived self-confidence, when faced with adversity, they were able to reach within themselves and apply skills and knowledge they already possessed in a way that afforded them eventual success instead of being demoralized to the point of losing their efficiency and focus. One participant's perspective was that as a leader, he has the power to affect the school climate in a positive or negative manner every day, and that although there must be allowances for being human, as a leader he must also be ever-conscious of the ripple effect his attitude can have on those who surround him. Another participant explained how they used challenges as opportunities to collaborate with their team because they realized that outcomes were not contingent on their efforts alone:

All participants spoke about self-assessment and reflection as tools for continual leadership improvement and discussed the importance of perspective in doing the best they can, and giving themselves grace when they do their best and it's not enough to fix everything. They shared how difficult it is to be at peace with themselves when they cannot solve every problem, yet they expressed it is necessary to be realistic while keeping sight of the vision and working towards it. They noted it is also important to acknowledge and encourage the hard work and efforts of others.

These findings are indicative of Bandura's theory that when faced with complex or challenging tasks, leaders with a high level of self-efficacy view the challenge as a

factor within their role and responsibility so they move to secure whatever is needed to meet the obligation. Moreover, the findings in the literature regarding influences on the efficacy of school principals disclosed a definitive link between self- efficacy and working conditions within the context of educational leadership. Westberry (2021) illustrated the unique challenges for principals who were largely unprepared to manage curriculum and instructional delivery for virtual instruction. For many, a lack of technological resources and support, and inadequate interpersonal skills for dealing with the many diverse administrative, instructional, and human relations demands were also hurdles to overcome. During a pandemic and in the aftermath of a mass shooting, students need more than academic support. The emotional demands on the school leader to provide and model social emotional support to students, families, staff, and themselves necessitated specialized skill sets as well as inner strength and compassion that was a hefty requirement for principals (Azukas, 2022; Diliberti et al., 2020; Justus et al., 2023; Rochester et al., 2023).

Implications of the Findings

The findings of this qualitative study can be beneficial to the arena of educational leadership in that they provide insight to the experiences of elementary principals from their perspectives and in their voices. The researcher’s review of existing literature yielded few qualitative studies about elementary principals and their lived experiences, and self- efficacy, and none on the self-efficacy of elementary principals in the district where this study was conducted— the largest school district in the southeastern United States (and sixth largest in the nation).

The questions that guided this study sought to determine how elementary principals perceived their efficacy relative to the specialized skills and general ability to perform well, how they modified their leadership style meet the demands of the role, how their perceived self- efficacy was influenced by trainings and professional relationships, and how their lived experiences as educational leaders contributed to their perceived sense of self- efficacy. The responses to these questions revealed that study participants had high levels of perceived self-efficacy regarding their performance and qualifications for the job of principal. They also believe that leading with compassion and flexibility and making connections for collaboration with stakeholders is a more effective way to lead in these times. In addition, they believe that trainings they received greatly impacted their job performance and that their professional relationships increased their perceived levels of self- efficacy. Participants' experiences both increased and decreased their perceived self-efficacy, and while negative experiences temporarily lowered their perceived self- efficacy, they also served as catalysts for perseverance and resilience that helped them create favorable outcomes that ultimately increased their perceived self- efficacy. Based on these findings the researcher has noted the following implications.

Support for the After-Effects of Trauma

Study findings illuminated the complexity of serving in the capacity of administrator and instructional leader of an elementary school. Each of those titles encompasses a plethora of responsibilities that require skills, knowledge, integrity, diplomacy, and courage. While the findings revealed the study participants were knowledgeable, highly-skilled, passionate, resilient, and possessed a high level of perceived self- efficacy, these qualifications did not make them impervious to the effects

of stress, lack of time and resources, and what they perceived as a lack of appreciation for their dedication and hard work. Moreover, the subjects felt that those in charge of educational regulations had little regard for their humanity. These findings coincided with those of previous studies about the effects of systemic demands and stressful work environments on school principals (Bell-Ellwanger, 2019; Denecker, 2019; Yan, 2020).

The literature established that educational leaders were deeply affected, personally and professionally by the COVID-19 pandemic. Numerous studies spoke about the overwhelming administrative demands, safety concerns, and fear that challenged the skills and resolve of even veteran principals (Diliberti et al., 2021; Lochmiller & Mancinelli, 2019; Murphy, 2021). The researcher deduced findings that were in alignment with data from current literature. Participants described their COVID leadership experience as one that tested all aspects of their abilities. For example, they were just as afraid as their charges, yet they had to find the courage and essentials to keep the learning community intact, and lead with compassion and positivity. These participants had already grappled with anxiety, confusion, and unexpected demands from policymakers the previous school year after a mass shooting at a high school in their district. Although the participants themselves did not experience a mass shooting at their school site, they all experienced the aftereffects of the tragedy. They felt the shock, fear, and sorrow of their district community.

State and district officials revised safety regulations and new gun laws were passed at the state and national levels. These measures were said to have provided some reassurance and stability (Hudson, 2022). Notwithstanding, study findings indicated a need for the acknowledgement of the trauma experienced by principals and support to

help them process their fears and concerns beyond the implementation and management of safety measures. This may be achievable through support groups and as a component of ongoing professional development and education. The researcher did not uncover any scholarly literature on the effect of mass shootings on elementary school principals outside of news reports and literature pertaining to principals whose schools were the site of these violent events (Schildkraut et al., 2021). However, studies examining the role of principals as security director in the context of a safety threat have substantiated the need for school principals to be proactive about selfcare during and after times of crises such as a mass shooting and a pandemic. Experts called upon federal, state and district agencies to provide greater assistance in preserving the emotional and physical well-being of school principals (Hayes et al., 2022; Sabuncuoglu & Beytekin, 2022).

Principal Preparation and Professional Development Programs

Study findings showed that although participants considered the preparation they received from district programs to be adequate, it was not sufficient for every area of need. Responsibilities that required highly specific skills such as overseeing the school budget, interpreting student data, leading teachers in the use of data to drive instruction, and virtual delivery of quality instruction were areas in which principals needed more training and mentorship, and ongoing professional development and support. The findings of this study also implied a need for greater focus on equity training and a balance between preparing students for test proficiency and inclusion of special education students within instructional leadership. This balance can be challenging amid pressure for high student achievement in a region where schools receive letter grades for school performance, but it is required by law and district leaders are obligated to provide

training and support for teacher and principals to that end (Sider et al., 2017; Sun & Xin, 2020; U.S. Department of Education, 2018). These findings echoed the literature regarding principal training and development and the needs that still existed among those who were already in the position of principal (Acton, 2021; Superville, 2022). Having the skills to do well in all areas helps to build one's sense of efficacy. High levels of perceived self- efficacy in leadership ability results in mastery and the increased probability of achieving organizational goals (Bandura, 1977; Sun & Xin, 2020).

Implications for Local District and Educational Policymakers

The findings of this study can be beneficial to the district where the study took place, and for education policymakers at district and state levels. The participants' descriptions of their lived experiences provided a window to their world and their voices articulated their personal experiences within the context of trying to satisfy the requirements of educational mandates. These findings may help to inform educational practices by helping to guide the development of principal training curriculum and the enhancement of existing programs for the training, mentorship, and evaluation of principals. It is important to note that although they shared their challenges and frustrations, they also shared their willingness to work hard and their commitment to the profession.

Study results corresponded with other studies that explored the unique needs of school principals, and the need for training, support, and systems that consider the overwhelming demands of the role. Likewise, the study finding showed that the support, resources, and compassion they desire are not only reasonable, but necessary for the performance outcomes these entities have mandated. The research literature has

established that when members of an organization are properly equipped and given the resources and support needed to meet objectives and expectations, they are more likely to achieve organizational objectives and maintain a high level of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1982; Kim, 2020; Thomas-EL et al., 2020).

Limitations of the Study

The researcher distinguished several limitations of this study. The primary limitation is the small sample size. The study included only six participants from a large school district in the southeastern United States. The data from such a small sample size does not reflect the perceptions of all elementary principals in that district or elementary principals in general. Additionally, the research data collection took place at a point in time when mitigating circumstances (a mass shooting followed by a pandemic) had presented uncommon challenges for study participants. There is a chance that if these events had not occurred, their responses about their experiences may have been different.

Additionally, accountability demands, and performance expectations have remained the same despite limited resources and the increased needs of staff and students. Within this environment of stressful expectations and limited autonomy, participants may have been apprehensive about disclosing the full scope of their experiences and their true opinions about educational policy on matters related to their current position. For example, they may not have felt they were adequately trained to evaluate teachers (especially those who teach specialized subjects like music and science) or to interpret student data yet claimed a strong sense of efficacy for ability in those areas for fear of being regarded as incompetent. Even with the reassurance of anonymity, some participants may not have been completely honest or forthcoming about their experiences

and feelings for fear of being reported to their superiors or other district personnel as someone who is disgruntled or unable to handle the pressures of the job. This study relied on the self-reporting of participants who for the afore-mentioned reasons may have withheld or misrepresented some of the requested information.

Lastly, although the researcher attempted to circumvent personal bias throughout the study processes by bracketing personal bias in a journal and conferring with peers, there is still a possibility that because the researcher was an educator in the district where the study was conducted and had personal knowledge of leadership and employee challenges, she may have been unaware of subtle and unintended bias.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future Research at the Local District

Based on the findings of the qualitative study, it would be beneficial for the district to commission a study that would further explore the efficiency of principal preparation programs in preparing administrators to complete both operational job and instructional leadership requirements with high levels of aptitude and perceived self – efficacy in both domains. This information could help to inform decisions regarding the district’s leadership policies, principal preparation, and professional development and mentorship. Creating such policies and programs based on hard data would allow them to identify strengths and weaknesses and target specific areas of need within their organization.

More In-Depth Exploration of Identified Themes

This study identified nine major themes, (a) principalship requires high-level skill sets and abilities (b) principals must have a high levels of perceived self- efficacy, (c)

prioritize time management to fulfill critical obligations, (d) leading with compassion and flexibility fosters trust and a sense of community, (e) connecting with stakeholders builds collaborative relationships, (f) professional training programs greatly impact job performance, (g) professional relationships increased perceived levels of self-efficacy, (h) leadership experiences both increase and decrease perceived levels of self-efficacy, and (i) negative experiences can increase self-efficacy.

While studies about the role of principals are plentiful, a deeper analysis of each of these themes within the context of the role would be highly beneficial for better understanding of the experience with the intent to use this understanding to provide awareness within the educational arena, and additional support for school principals. Such investigation can also inform creators of principal preparation and educational leadership curriculum for school districts and institutions of higher learning.

Conclusion

This qualitative study is relevant to the field of education and educational leadership. It provides an important perspective on the current climate in public education from the viewpoint of individuals who serve in the demanding capacity of school principal. School principals play a crucial role in instruction and learning. Their belief in their ability to make their school a place where teachers can create innovative and productive learning environments that generate high achievement and learning gains for all students is crucial to their success as educational leaders. It is their daily efforts that results in outstanding instructional practices and student performance. This study revealed a need for greater balance between job performance expectations and support for school principals. The researcher recommends that more qualitative studies about the

educational leadership experience be done on a larger scale. Such research would be valuable in identifying systemic deficiencies and possible solutions to create the balance that school principals need and deserve.

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Appendix A

Table of Specifications

Table of Specifications

		Research Questions			
	1. How do elementary school principals in a large southeastern school district perceive their capabilities and level of self-efficacy for their position of school principal?	2. How have elementary principals in a large southeastern school district adapted their leadership style to align with performance requirements for their roles and responsibilities?	3. How do elementary principals in a large southeastern school district view the influence of professional training and professional relationships on their level of self-efficacy?	4. How have the experiences of these elementary principals contributed to their perceived level of self-efficacy?	
Interview Question					
Section 1: Introduction and Preliminary Information					
1. What is your highest level of education?		X			
2. How long have you been a principal?		X			
3. Describe the trajectory of your career experiences before becoming an elementary school principal.		X			
4. What was it that made you want to become a principal?		X			
5. What capabilities and skills did you feel you possessed that qualified you for the role of elementary principal?		X			
Section 2: Self-Efficacy in the Role of Elementary Principal					
6. As a school principal, do you regard your role primarily as an administrator or an instructional leader?			X		

 Research Questions

1. How do elementary school principals in a large southeastern school district perceive their capabilities and level of self-efficacy for their position of school principal?	2. How have elementary principals in a large southeastern school district adapted their leadership style to align with performance requirements for their roles and responsibilities?	3. How do elementary principals in a large southeastern school district view the influence of professional training and professional relationships on their level of self-efficacy?	4. How have the lived experiences of these elementary principals contributed to their perceived level of self-efficacy?
7. How do you define/describe your role as an administrator? What is your level of efficacy for performing this role?	X		
8. How do you define/describe your role as an instructional leader? What is your level of efficacy for performing this role?	X		
9. How do you view your role as data analyst/manager?	X		
10. In your efforts to create and sustain a positive level of teacher/staff morale, how do you maintain a positive outlook and sense of efficacy?	X		
Section 3: Influences of Professional Development and Training Programs on Self-Efficacy			
11. What type of preparatory training did the school district provide you for your job as a principal?		X	

 Research Questions

1. How do elementary school principals in a large southeastern school district perceive their capabilities and level of self-efficacy for their position of school principal?	2. How have elementary principals in a large southeastern school district adapted their leadership style to align with performance requirements for their roles and responsibilities?	3. How do elementary principals in a large southeastern school district view the influence of professional training and professional relationships on their level of self-efficacy?	4. How have the lived experiences of these elementary principals contributed to their perceived level of self-efficacy?
12. Do you feel this training was sufficient preparation for what the role actually required? Please explain what aspects of the training you feel were adequate and what aspects you believe may be enhanced in some way.	X		
13. What kind of ongoing support is available once a principal is appointed? How long is this support system in place?	X		
14. Describe how your leadership experience would have differed without this support.	X		
15. What type of professional development were you required to complete in preparation for conducting teacher evaluations?	X		
16. How confident are you with evaluating teachers based on this of training knowing their salary and retention are determined, in large part, by your evaluation?	X		

 Research Questions

1. How do elementary school principals in a large southeastern school district perceive their capabilities and level of self-efficacy for their position of school principal?	2. How have elementary principals in a large southeastern school district adapted their leadership style to align with performance requirements for their roles and responsibilities?	3. How do elementary principals in a large southeastern school district view the influence of professional training and professional relationships on their level of self-efficacy?	4. How have the lived experiences of these elementary principals contributed to their perceived level of self-efficacy?
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17. How have professional development and ongoing support programs such as mentorship helped to shape your efficacy beliefs?

X

Section 4: How Lived Experiences Shape Efficacy Beliefs

18. How have prior personal and professional experiences helped to shape your efficacy beliefs as an educational leader?

X

19. How would you describe your leadership style and the methods you use to influence your staff, students, and the community you serve?

X

20. Please describe your greatest challenge and your greatest accomplishment as a principal thus far. How have these experiences strengthened or diminished your belief in your capabilities and your resolve to perform?

X

 Research Questions

	1. How do elementary school principals in a large southeastern school district perceive their capabilities and level of self-efficacy for their position of school principal?	2. How have elementary principals in a large southeastern school district adapted their leadership style to align with performance requirements for their roles and responsibilities?	3. How do elementary principals in a large southeastern school district view the influence of professional training and professional relationships on their level of self-efficacy?	4. How have the lived experiences of these elementary principals contributed to their perceived level of self-efficacy?
21. As a principal you play a number of important roles as you must complete the many tasks that are required of you, such as building supervisor, data manager, and community liaison, just to name a few. In which of your leadership roles do you feel most confident? Why?				X
22. What strategies have you developed to help you deal with the competing demands of your various roles?				X
23. What do you believe is the one thing that would empower you most to perform at your most efficient level?				X

Appendix B
Interview Protocol for Principals

Interview Protocol for Principals

Project: Explore the awareness, perception, and importance of self-efficacy in the role of educational leadership and practice in a large southeastern school district. Time of interview: 2-hour interview

Date: _____ **Place:** _____ **Interviewer:** Barbara J. Hall
Position: Doctoral Student

Project description: This is a project that is designed to explore the lived experiences of elementary principals regarding their efficacy beliefs and practices as they strive to fulfill the rigorous demands of administration and instructional leadership in their role as an elementary school principal in a large southeastern school district.

Interviewee: _____

Thank you so much for taking time out of your busy schedule to meet with me. My name is Barbara Hall, and I am a doctoral candidate at Nova Southeastern University. I created this research project to satisfy the requirements for a Doctor of Education degree. The purpose of this study is to engage with educational leaders to develop a better understanding of who you are and your sense of efficacy regarding the roles that you play, and to describe the lived experiences of elementary principals in a large southeastern school district. In the face of increasing educator accountability amid public scrutiny, self-efficacy is an even more relevant consideration for success as an educational leader.

Please know that this interview is in no way designed to critique your performance as a principal. The objective is to get to know a little about you as a person and a professional and to get your perspective on some subject areas that relate to the topic of the study. It is perfectly normal to feel nervous or to even become a bit uncomfortable with certain questions. If you become uncomfortable at any time or need a break for any reason, please do not hesitate to let me know. I will stop the interview and do everything I can to accommodate your needs.

The interview process will be as follows:

- To begin, we will discuss the meaning of the terms *efficacy* and *self-efficacy* to help you understand the relevance of these concepts to you as a person and an educational leader. It is also important to ensure you understand the relevance of these terms to the study.
- The interview questions will be divided into four categories based on the research questions listed in the study: Section 1, Introduction and Preliminary Information; Section 2, Self- Efficacy Practices in the Role of Elementary Principal; Section 3, Influences of Professional Development and Training Programs on Self-Efficacy; and Section 4, How Lived Experiences Shape Efficacy Beliefs.
- You will be given a brief introduction to each section before any questions in that

section are asked. Please stop me at any time if you do not understand the question or need clarification.

I can repeat or rephrase the question and provide additional information whenever you need me to.

Section 1: Introduction and Preliminary Information

1. What is your highest level of education?
2. How long have you been a principal?
3. Describe the trajectory of your career experiences before becoming an elementary school principal.
4. What was it that made you want to become a principal?

Section 2: Self- Efficacy Practices in the Role of Elementary Principal

5. What capabilities and skills did you feel you possessed that qualified you for the role of elementary principal?
6. As a school principal, do you regard your role primarily as an administrator or an instructional leader?
7. How do you define/describe your role as an administrator? What is your level of efficacy for performing this role?
8. How do you define/describe your role as an instructional leader? What is your level of efficacy for performing this role?
9. How do you view your role as data analyst/manager?
10. In your efforts to create and sustain a positive level of teacher/staff morale, how do you maintain a positive outlook and sense of efficacy?

Section 3: Influences of Professional Development and Training Programs on Self-Efficacy

11. What type of preparatory training did the school district provide you for your job as a principal?
12. Do you feel this training was sufficient preparation for what the role actually required? Please explain what aspects of the training you feel were adequate and what aspects you believe may be enhanced in some way.
13. What kind of ongoing support is available once a principal is appointed? How long is this support system in place?
14. Describe how your leadership experience would have differed without this support.
15. What type of professional development were you required to complete in preparation? For conducting teacher evaluations?
16. How confident are you with evaluating teachers based on this of training—knowing their salary and retention are determined, in large part, by your evaluation?
17. How have professional development and ongoing support programs such as mentorship helped to shape your efficacy beliefs?

Section 4: How Lived Experiences Shape Efficacy Beliefs

18. How have prior personal and professional experiences helped to shape your efficacy beliefs as an educational leader?
19. How would you describe your leadership style and the methods you use to influence your staff, students, and the community you serve?
20. Please describe your greatest challenge and your greatest accomplishment as a principal thus far. How have these experiences strengthened or diminished your belief in your capabilities and your resolve to perform?
21. As a principal you play a number of important roles as you must complete the many tasks that are required of you such as building supervisor, data manager, and community liaison, just to name a few. In which of your leadership roles do you feel most confident? Why?
22. What strategies have you developed to help you deal with the competing demands of your various roles?
23. What do you believe is the one thing that would empower you most to perform at your most efficient level?

Appendix C

Photovoice Protocol for Principals

Photovoice Protocol for Principals

Project: Developing a better understanding of the perceived self-efficacy of elementary principals regarding their roles and responsibilities in a large southeastern school district through participant-generated photographs.

Photo collection time frame: 5 days (Monday through Friday)

Time of photo-elicited interview: 2-hour interview

Date: _____

Place: _____

Interviewer: Barbara J. Hall

Position: Doctoral Student

Project description: This is a project that is designed to explore the lived experiences of elementary principals regarding their efficacy beliefs and practices as they strive to fulfill the rigorous demands of administration and instructional leadership in a large southeastern school district.

Participant: _____

My name is Barbara Hall, and I am a doctoral candidate at Nova Southeastern University. I created this research project to satisfy the requirements for a Doctor of Education degree. The purpose of this study is to engage with leaders such as yourself to hear your voices and develop a better understanding of who you are and your sense of self in the very important roles you play and to describe these experiences of elementary principals in a large southeastern school district. In the face of increasing educator accountability amid public scrutiny, self-efficacy is more than ever before a very relevant consideration for the educational leadership skill set.

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this second part of the research project. This part of the project is designed for you to share aspects of your experience as a principal as it relates to your efficacy beliefs and practice. This will be accomplished through photography and journalism in what the writer will refer to as an individual *photo journal*.

You will create your Photovoice project in the following manner:

You will be given a 35-millimeter Fujifilm 400 disposable camera with 12 exposures and a notebook. Both items have been labeled with a number that distinguishes you from other participants. Please do not remove or modify these labels in any way.

For one academic week (Monday through Friday), please use your disposable camera to

capture any images (*other than students, employees, and any human subjects*) that you believe are reflective of your efficacy beliefs, and factors that influence (or have influenced) your self-efficacy as you perform your tasks as an elementary principal. These images can include places, objects, and situations that represent challenges, triumphs, fears, strengths, and any other aspect of your professional experience that you would like to illustrate for the researcher.

To fully capture the essence of what your photographs are saying, the writer would like you to maintain a journal that will be written in conjunction with your photography. Here is how it will work:

Your disposable camera contains 12 exposures. In the notebook you were provided, you will write an entry for each photograph you take. When you decide on an image to photograph, it is imperative that you note the exposure number and subject of the photograph in your journal right away. Additionally, take a moment to reflect on the subject of the photograph. Please write to share why you chose to capture it on film and what aspect of your personal experience as a leader each image represented. When completed, your journal should contain 12 descriptions, one for each image in your disposable camera.

On the Monday following the last day of your photo journal week, I will come to your school site in person to collect your disposable camera and journal. Please place both the camera and journal in the manila envelope you will be provided at the time of your interview. If at any time before beginning this venture or during the week you need assistance of any kind, please do not hesitate to give me a call on my personal number.

Once the photographs have been developed, we will schedule a time to talk about the photographs and what they mean to you. This conversation will be recorded for accuracy in the same way the interview was recorded. After I complete my analysis of the photographs and the information you share about their meaning, I will create a narrative interpretation of the results. I will e-mail a copy of this report to you. I would like you to read it and give me your feedback. Your input is very important as the aim of the study is to tell *your* story as authentically as possible.

Again, please feel free to contact me at any time if you should have any questions or concerns. Thank you for your participation in this important project.

Appendix D

Introductory E-Mail and Informed Consent

Introductory E-Mail and Informed Consent

Dear _____

My name is Barbara Hall, and I am a doctoral candidate at Nova Southeastern University's Adam Fischler College of Education. Doctoral candidates are required to design and conduct a research study that will enable them to add to the existing body of knowledge on the topic of their study.

You are receiving this letter as a personal invitation to participate in a study about elementary school principals: *Instructional Leadership and Self-Efficacy: A Case Study About Elementary School Principals*. As the primary investigator, I would like to engage with elementary principals in your school district for the purpose of developing a better understanding of how their perceived self-efficacy is shaped by their lived experiences as well as professional support and training. Because of the highly critical roles principals play in today's academic arena, I believe that self-efficacy, or the way one views his or her ability to perform within a specific context, is a subject that is relevant and worthy of investigation. However, the existing literature has little to offer on the subject, especially from the perspective of elementary principals.

This case study project is not designed to critique your performance as a principal in any way. The aim of the study is to better understand your lived experience as an educational leader and share a perspective from the principal's side of the desk. It is my hope that because of you and other principals sharing your insight and experiences, the results of this study may be used to help develop and enhance principal preparation programs, professional support, and effect positive change for future educational policy.

Attached you will find a form that provides detailed information about the study and what will be expected if you elect to participate. Please be assured that the proposed study has met the approval of the rigorous evaluation standards of the Internal Review Boards of Nova Southeastern University and The Broward County School District's Internal Review Board. If you are interested in participating on the study, you may provide your consent by completing the information on the final page of the attached document and returning it to me at bh805@mynsu.novs.edu.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Warmest Regards,

Barbara J. Hall, M.S.

Informed Consent

**General Informed Consent Form
NSU Consent to be in a Research Study Entitled**

Instructional Leadership and Self-Efficacy: A Case Study About Elementary School Principals

Who is doing this research study?

College: Adam Fischler School of Education

Principal Investigator:
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Site Information:
Wilton Manors Elementary School
2401 NE 3 Avenue,
Wilton Manors, Florida. 33305

Funding: Unfunded

What is this study about?

This is a research study, designed to explore the lived experiences of elementary principals. The purpose of this research study is to better understand elementary principals' self-efficacy, or personal belief in their ability carry out the roles and responsibilities ascribed to them as educational leaders. The researcher believes it is important to understand the position of elementary principals and what contributes to their self-efficacy. This understanding can lead to the creation/improvement of effective principal preparation programs as well as help to shape more effective and supportive educational policy.

Why are you asking me to be in this research study?

You are being asked to participate in this research study because you are the principal of an elementary school in Broward County.

This study will include about six people. It is expected that all six participants will be from this school district.

What will I be doing if I agree to be in this research study?

While you are taking part in this research study, the researcher will interview you to learn about your experiences as a principal. You will also be given a disposable camera to take pictures of things in your work environment that you feel is relative to your experiences as a principal. The researcher will review the photographs with you to discuss their meaning. We will meet twice for: 1) A face-to-face interview, and 2) Reviewing and discussing your photographs. Each session will last about two hours. Other communication will be done via email. However, if you would like additional time to personally meet with the researcher for any reason, an additional meeting can be arranged.

Research Study Procedures - as a participant, this is what you will be doing:

- You will be provided a copy of the interview questions for your review. After an initial interview has been scheduled, you will meet with the researcher to answer the interview questions. The interview will be audiotaped to ensure accuracy during transcription.
- After the first interview, you will participate in the second part of the study using a method called *Photovoice*. You will be given a disposable camera, a notebook for recording photo captions and any thoughts about the images you capture, and an envelope in which to place all these items. You will be asked to use the camera to take pictures of anything relevant to your role as a principal for one week, Monday through Friday. The researcher will schedule a time to retrieve the materials directly from you (A Photovoice protocol will provide specific instructions for how this is to be done).
- Once the film is developed the researcher will meet with you for the second interview to review and discuss the photos and what they symbolize to you. This interview will also be audiotaped for accuracy.
- After the data has been analyzed, the researcher will send you a copy of the preliminary findings. At this time, you will be asked to give your input on the narrative. The researcher will provide all participants a copy of the final report.

Could I be removed from the study early by the research team?

There are several reasons why the researchers may need to remove you from the study early. Some reasons are: If you are no longer a principal, or are no longer employed by Broward County School Board, or fail to meet participation requirements such as being present for interviews.

Are there possible risks and discomforts to me?

This research study involves minimal risk to you. To the best of our knowledge, the things you will be doing have no more risk of harm than you would have in everyday life.

What happens if I do not want to be in this research study?

You have the right to leave this research study at any time or refuse to be in it. If you decide to leave or you do not want to be in the study anymore, you will not be penalized in any way. If you choose to stop being in the study before it is over, any information about you that was collected **before** the date you leave the study will be kept in the research records for 36 months from the end of the study and may be used as a part of the research.

What if there is new information learned during the study that may affect my decision to remain in the study?

If significant new information relating to the study becomes available, which may relate to whether you want to remain in this study, this information will be given to you by the investigator. You may be asked to sign a new Informed Consent Form if the information is given to you after you have joined the study.

Will I be paid or be given compensation for being in the study?

You will not be given any payments or compensation for being in this research study.

Will it cost me anything?

There are no costs to you for being in this research study. All the materials you need for participation in the study will be provided to you by the researcher.

How will you keep my information private?

Information we learn about you in this research study will be handled in a confidential manner, within the limits of the law and will be limited to people who have a need to review this information. Each participant will be assigned a pseudonym that will be associated with all their data. All data collected will be kept securely on a password-protected laptop and iPad. All photographs, logs, and notes will be kept in a locked file cabinet in the researcher's home office.

Data will only be available to the researcher, the Institutional Review Board and other representatives of this institution, and any regulatory agencies (if applicable). If we publish the results of the study in a scientific journal or book, we will not identify you. All data will be kept for 36 months and destroyed after that time by permanent deletion all digital of files and the shredding of all photo images, field notes, transcripts, and any other printed documents.

Will there be any Audio or Video Recording?

This research study involves audio recording. This recording will be available to the researcher, the Institutional Review Board, and other representatives of this institution. The recording will be kept, stored, and destroyed as stated in the section above. Because what is in the recording could be used to find out that it is you, it is not possible to be sure that the recording will always be kept confidential. The researcher will try to keep anyone not working on the research from listening to the recording.

Whom can I contact if I have questions, concerns, comments, or complaints?

If you have questions now, feel free to ask us. If you have more questions about the research, or your research rights, please contact:

Primary contact:
Jennifer Reeves, Ph. D, 850-727-8994

Research Participants Rights

For questions/concerns regarding your research rights, please contact:

Institutional Review Board
Nova Southeastern University
(954) 262-5369 / Toll Free: 1-866-499-0790
IRB@nova.edu

You may also visit the NSU IRB website at www.nova.edu/irb/information-for-research-participants for further information regarding your rights as a research participant.

Research Consent & Authorization Signature Section

Voluntary Participation - You are not required to participate in this study. In the event you do participate, you may leave this research study at any time. If you leave this research study before it is completed, there will be no penalty to you, and you will not lose any benefits to which you are entitled.

If you agree to participate in this research study, sign this section. You will be given a signed copy of this form to keep. You do not waive any of your legal rights by signing this form.

SIGN THIS FORM ONLY IF THE STATEMENTS LISTED BELOW ARE TRUE:

- You have read the above information.
- Your questions have been answered to your satisfaction about the research.

Adult Signature Section

I have voluntarily decided to take part in this research study.

Printed Name of Participant

Signature of Participant

Date

Printed Name of Person Obtaining
Consent and Authorization

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent &
Authorization

Date

Appendix E

Photovoice Data Analysis Charts

Photovoice Data Analysis Charts

The image displays three photovoice data analysis charts, each organized into three columns: PHOTO, DESCRIPTION, and CODES. The charts are numbered 1, 2, and 3, with the numbers written in large blue, red, and yellow circles respectively.

Chart 1:

- PHOTO 1.1:** A camera lens. **DESCRIPTION:** Camera in box. **CODES:** Italiany camera, Big Brother is always watching, excellence someone is always watching (my campus).
- PHOTO 1.2:** A hallway. **DESCRIPTION:** Hallway with lockers. **CODES:** immaculate hallways, first entrance, first point of entry, first impression of our school.
- PHOTO 1.3:** A computer monitor. **DESCRIPTION:** Computer monitor. **CODES:** Dual monitors, Jim of responsibility in operations, before school, after school.
- PHOTO 1.4:** A desk. **DESCRIPTION:** Desk with papers. **CODES:** "in" and "out" bags, lots of things go "in" daily, do my best, "out" things "out" quickly.
- PHOTO 1.5:** A chessboard. **DESCRIPTION:** Chessboard. **CODES:** Chess board, see the game, respect, strategic, challenge.

Chart 2:

- PHOTO 2.1:** A website banner. **DESCRIPTION:** Website banner. **CODES:** Elem. website banner page, "input", capture the community attention, line of communication, information, Consciousness, awareness, Leadership, Book, impact on awareness.
- PHOTO 2.2:** A wall mural. **DESCRIPTION:** Wall mural. **CODES:** Wall mural is school vision reflection, Jim is as a leader, International leader.
- PHOTO 2.3:** A mural. **DESCRIPTION:** Mural. **CODES:** Outside, sitting area, think about school, breathe, reflect, "parent" work, Teacher certificate, PAU diploma, Service Awards, accomplishments, respect, alumni/teacher.

Chart 3:

- PHOTO 3.1:** A security proposal. **DESCRIPTION:** Security proposal. **CODES:** Security proposal, (Alphabetical), want visitors, life, personal, "strong" confidence, you should not be put upon, proposal, Breakfast smoother, noon, breakfast smoother on desk.
- PHOTO 3.2:** A car line. **DESCRIPTION:** Car line. **CODES:** Parent pick-up, kids, home safe, connecting with parents, car line.
- PHOTO 3.3:** A calendar. **DESCRIPTION:** Calendar. **CODES:** One day of calendar, Calendar, "Baked" and Evaluation, Observation, meetings, hanging with district, Planning, Agenda, Preparation, for impact, attention, "social" input, design, (alphabetical).

