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Los Angeles

Running on Faith: Factors Contributing to  
Catholic School Principal Retention  
in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the  
Requirements for the degree Doctor of Education

by

Allison Jordan Hurtt

2020



## ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Running on Faith: Factors Contributing to  
Catholic School Principal Retention  
in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles

by

Allison Jordan Hurtt

Doctor of Education

University of California, Los Angeles, 2020

Professor Robert Cooper, Chair

At both the national and state level, school leadership turnover is at an alarmingly high rate. The role of a Catholic school principal as a spiritual, educational, and managerial leader has led to an ever-increasing workload that has been attributed to increased turnover. This qualitative study examined the factors contributing to principal retention in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles. Exploring the factors that contribute to long-term tenure in a principal position has the potential to influence the way the Archdiocese supports principals moving forward, thus contributing to greater sustainability for Catholic schools as a whole. Data was collected through in-depth interviews from 11 lay school leaders in low-income communities who have served at least 5

years in their position as elementary Catholic school principals. The findings articulate factors contributing to principal retention as well as recommendations for effective systems of support.

The dissertation of Allison Jordan Hurtt is approved.

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2020

## DEDICATION

To my amazing husband, Matthew. You made me more breakfast sandwiches than I ever deserved and made me work when I couldn't bring myself to. You have been by my side since the beginning, creating work for yourself just so I wouldn't be working alone. I could not be more grateful for your love and steadfast support. You are the greatest life partner.

To my mom. I grew up hearing you called Dr. Peggy and have watched you live a life in service to others. I have wanted to be just like you since I was a young girl. You gave me this bleeding heart and I thank you for that.

To all the other Jordans...I'd like to think I'm as resilient as I am because I'm a Jordan. Your love is passionate, loud, and unwavering. You are a constant reminder to me to be unapologetically myself. I'm so very proud to be a part of this family.

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To my school community, you have inspired me every day for the last 10 years. You are the reason I started this degree and the reason I finished it. Thank you for allowing me to lead you and for grounding me in my faith year after year. I am forever changed by our relationships.

Finally, I must thank my study participants and all of the amazing principals serving beautiful communities with unimaginable challenges. Thank you for the work that you do and thank you for trusting me with your ideas. You are a gift to all those you serve.

## VITA

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

This study examined principal retention in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles' system of schools. Exploring the factors that contribute to long-term tenure in a principal position has the potential to influence the way the school system supports principals moving forward, thus contributing to greater sustainability for Catholic schools as a whole.

### **Researcher's Positionality**

What motivated me to conduct this particular research extends beyond the overarching problem of turnover, as will be discussed in great length. I am also motivated by personal purpose because I am a Catholic elementary school principal myself. I am currently serving a beautiful, yet vulnerable, community in the inner city of Los Angeles. The last 4 years as the school's principal have been the most challenging, yet rewarding, years of my life. I have faced seemingly endless obstacles and have found integral support that has carried me through my most troubling days. My reality has been a juxtaposition of immense struggle and overwhelming joy. In conducting this research, I was motivated to discover if my reality was typical or an anomaly.

Having been a part of the system for the last 10 years, I have watched many principals move on, leaving their communities in precarious situations and without stable leadership. As will be discussed in the next chapter, a lack of stable leadership has an even greater detrimental impact on our most vulnerable communities. The topic of turnover is discussed time and time again, yet solutions to this ever-prevalent problem still seem far off. If speaking to those who have left has not offered impetus for lasting change, then why not speak to those who have stayed? The principals I see day after day doing the work and rejoicing in the small and grand

victories alike are seldom asked why they keep going. I yearned to understand their *why* more deeply, and in doing so be a part of the solution.

### **Background of the Problem**

At both the national and state level, principal turnover is at an alarmingly high rate (Hargreaves & Fink, 2011). School leadership in the U.S. is in crisis. For example, in California, the state will need approximately 5,000 new administrators by the year 2018, and about 20% of public school principals in the United States leave their positions each year (White, Fong, & Makkonen, 2010). A study conducted by Fuller and Young (2009) found that 50% of newly hired principals stayed for 3 years or less and less than 30% stayed beyond year 5. Average public school districts across the United States were found to lose anywhere between 15-30% of principals each year (Béteille, Kalogrides, & Loeb, 2012).

Not unlike the public sector, in the private school sector, the National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS, 2009) projected that 68% of United States independent school heads plan to retire or change jobs by 2019. Specifically, for the 6,525 Catholic schools across the U.S. it is speculated that many Catholic school administrative roles may become vacant due to the aging population of their leaders (Fitzgerald & Sabatino, 2014; McDonald & Schultz, 2016).

Many studies have focused on how important an effective principal is to a school (Branch, Hanushek, & Rivkin, 2013; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005). In fact, a school leader's effect on students contributes to 25% of school's total influence on a child's academic performance (Marzano et al., 2005). In a study conducted by Branch et al. (2013), results indicated that highly effective principals can raise the achievement gap of a typical student in their schools by an estimated 2-7 months in a single year. However, achieving such educational



outcomes requires persistent efforts by consistent leadership over time. Instability of leadership creates an impediment, especially in low-performing schools, which are typically found in socioeconomically challenged communities (Babo & Postma, 2017; Burkhauser, Gates, & Hamilton, 2012; Evans, 2010; Gates et al., 2006). High poverty schools are 50% less likely than middle-class schools to be led by the same principal over a 6-year period (Branch et al., 2013). Although highly effective principals can wield a significant positive impact each year of their tenure, it takes an average of 5 years to put a mobilizing vision in place, improve the quality of the teaching staff, and fully implement policies that positively influence the school's overall performance (Horng, Klasik, & Loeb, 2010).

Principals leave the job for many reasons. In a study conducted by the National Association of Elementary School Principals, principals identified four key obstacles that directly contribute to turnover: (a) workload and extensive managerial tasks preventing meaningful instructional efforts; (b) expensive personal costs such as long hours and a significant toll on their physical and psychological well-being; (c) local and state policies that tie their hands when making critical decisions specifically relating to hiring, firing, and funding allocation; and (d) profound isolation on the job (Johnson, 2005).

According to research conducted by Gates et al. (2006) in Illinois on principal turnover, school characteristics play a significant role in predicting principals' transitions. Such characteristics include but are not limited to the racial makeup of the student body, school size, and overwhelming demands of the job. They found that the racial makeup of the student body is a substantial predictor of the probability that a principal will change schools or positions, with the percent of the study body that is non-White positively relating to both the probability of changing schools and changing positions. According to the study's findings, on average,

principals in urban areas of Chicago were about 50% more likely to switch schools than principals in suburban areas. Principals in large schools were found to be less likely to leave their schools or positions, primarily due to the salary differentials and a larger personnel and support staff (Gates et al., 2003).

Although the aforementioned results were identified in studies conducted in public schools, the majority of Catholic elementary schools across the nation reflect a similar demographic while also experiencing high turnover. For example, in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles (ADLA) in 2018 alone, nearly 25% of all principal positions became vacant, with very few qualified candidates available to fill them. In both the public and private sector, principal turnover has had a devastating impact and literature confirms a need for future principals in both sectors (Fitzgerald & Sabatino, 2014; Hargreaves & Fink, 2011; NAIS, 2009).

Today, fewer teachers are aspiring to the principalship due to the increasing demands of the job and their perceptions of school principals being overworked, overstressed, underpaid, and overwhelmed with administrative details that have little to do with educating students (Fenwick & Pierce, 2001). Similarly, in the public sector, in a summary of responses to survey questions given by 90 principals from a diverse collection of school districts at the Principals' Leadership Summit in July of 2000, when asked what are the major challenges that discourage a person from pursuing the principalship as a career goal, the five primary reasons were found to be the changing demands of the job, salary, time, a lack of parent and/or community support, and a lack of respect (Kennedy, 2000).

Public school and Catholic school principals share many similar responsibilities and an overwhelmingly similar issue with turnover. However, the role of a Catholic school principal does vary from that of a public-school principal and must be examined independently in an effort

to best understand the factors contributing to retention. Catholic school principals operate within a unique organizational structure and from a distinct mission. The starkest contrast to the role of a public-school principal, of course, is in the primary mission of Catholic education as rooted in the teachings of Jesus Christ. Thus, a Catholic school principal must be an exemplary model of the faith, along with all of the other responsibilities of a traditional principal.

Catholic schools' primary mission is in the formation of its students' faith and calling them to be witnesses of their faith (Ciriello, 1996). According to the *National Congress Catholic Schools for the 21st Century: Executive Summary*, "Catholic schools are called to be exemplary models of academic excellence and faith development" (Kealey, 1992, p. 21). The mission of Catholic education is cultivated by each individual Catholic school in accordance with the Canon Law of the Roman Catholic Church (The Holy See, 1983). Catholic parochial<sup>1</sup> schools operate as an individual entity and function autonomously under the leadership of a pastor. In Catholic schools, executive governance vests authority in an individual, traditionally the Pastor. The pastor serves as the head decision maker of the parish school and is also responsible for hiring the school's principal. The Catholic school principal answers directly to the parish pastor and serves the Catholic Church as the school's spiritual, educational, and managerial leader (Ciriello, 1996). Hence, a skill critical to the success of a Catholic school principal is the ability to foster and maintain an amiable relationship with the school's pastor (Belmonte & Cranston, 2009).

This unique organizational structure can be both challenging and rewarding. Due to all authority being in the hands of the pastor, Catholic school principals face significantly less red tape than their public school counterparts. Depending on the pastor and his<sup>2</sup> level of involvement with the school, a school principal could have a substantial amount of autonomy and decision-

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<sup>1</sup> Parochial schools are Catholic schools associated with and supported by a specific parish, or church, and typically operate as the parish's largest ministry.

<sup>2</sup> In the Catholic Church, pastors are always men and women are not allowed to be priests or pastors.

making power at the school site. In this way, the Catholic school system is significantly less top-down in terms of structure; more decision-making happens at the local level, especially site-based decisions. Although the inconsistency in policies and practice among Catholic schools can and does pose challenges, principals have the potential for great autonomy and choice of access from curriculum selection to full control over the school's operating budget.

The primary role of the Catholic school principal is to serve as the spiritual leader of the school (The Archdiocese of Los Angeles, n.d.; Ciriello, 1996). The school principal was once a position held by religious men and women<sup>3</sup>, but now it is dominated by laypeople<sup>4</sup>; From the early 1800s to the 1960s, 90.1% of Catholic staff members were sisters, brothers, priests, and deacons (McDonald & Schultz, 2016). As a result, because they were members of a religious order and had taken vows, these Catholic school leaders had consistent support as spiritual leaders with ongoing faith formation, spiritual counsel, vocational training, and spiritual development opportunities. Miller (2006) asserted that religious men and women were the backbone of Catholic education, ensuring that the Catholic identity was sound and robust.

Since the 1970s, however, after Vatican II<sup>5</sup> and its emphasis on religious freedom, ecumenism, and openness, membership in religious vocations dropped significantly and Catholic schools have undergone significant changes pertaining to demography and functionality (Flynn & Mok, 2011; Miller, 2006). In the United States today, there are fewer than 75,000 religious members of whom more than 50% are over 70 years of age (Fitzgerald & Sabatino, 2014). The total number of nuns has fallen from roughly 180,000 in 1965 to about 50,000 in 2014: a 72% drop in a 50-year time span (Center for Applied Research of the Apostolate, n.d.). As a reflection

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<sup>3</sup> Men and women belonging to a religious order (i.e., priests, nuns).

<sup>4</sup> Non-religious members of the church; not belonging to a religious order.

<sup>5</sup> The Second Ecumenical Council (1962-65) of the Roman Catholic Church served as a means of spiritual renewal and a time to evaluate existing church practices, which led to new set of operating principles known to have shaped the modern Catholic Church.

of this decline in religious membership, the number of religious leaders in Catholic schools has shifted almost entirely to laypeople. Currently, 97% of full-time administrators, faculty, and staff are laypersons. Due to the decline in religious order membership, an increasing number of lay administrators are needed to fill principalship roles across the Catholic school systems (McDonald & Schultz, 2016). The shift from Catholic schools being staffed by religious people to laypeople, too, presents new obstacles in the form of funding. Laypeople require salaries and benefits at exorbitant costs as compared to the former religious leaders, bringing a school's operating budget to all-time highs without public funding or proper financial training. High operating costs cause Catholic schools to pay employees, including principals, between 25-45% below the salary scales of their public school counterparts.

The role of a Catholic school principal as a spiritual, educational, and managerial leader has led to an ever-increasing workload and stress, all of which contribute to increased turnover. Many principals are paralyzed by the fear of low enrollment, and worse, school closure. Since 2008, Catholic elementary school enrollment has declined by 27.5% in the 12 urban U.S. dioceses, including Los Angeles, and by 19.4% in the rest of U.S., with 1,336 Catholic schools having closed or consolidated due to financial crisis (National Catholic Education Association [NCEA], n.d.a). Over the last 20 years in particular, changes made to the role of principals have altered the principal's job, resulting in additional responsibilities for principals and leaving less time available for supervision of instruction and curriculum development (Fraser & Brock, 2006). Many principals apply for the position, are hired on, and then leave within 1-2 years due to being overwhelmed by the complexities of the position. For example, one-half of new Catholic school principals reported that they are lacking in theological training or spiritual knowledge (Schuttloffel, 2003). According to d'Arbon, Duignan, Duncane, and Goodwin (2001),

fewer people are applying for advertised positions in parish and diocesan Catholic schools, and in many instances, principal positions must be re-advertised due to lack of suitable applicants. High attrition rates of principals and the shortage of qualified candidates to fill vacancies make initiatives to improve principal retention increasingly important (Durow & Brock, 2004).

### **Statement of the Problem**

In the ADLA, Catholic schools have been experiencing significant principal turnover. High turnover rates of principals and the shortage of candidates to fill vacancies make initiatives to improve retention increasingly significant. There are many reasons why principals leave and there is research examining those reasons, yet there are very few studies on reasons why some choose to stay. This study strove to fill part of the gap in the research and give voice to those leaders who have served in their positions as school principal for 5 years or longer. By speaking to those who have stayed in their position, this study will provide insight into the leadership crisis in education, as well as to the factors that contribute to the longevity of principal leadership within Catholic schools more specifically. This study sought to understand the primary factors contributing to long-term principal retention in Catholic schools. The aim of using this data was to inform future hiring practices of Catholic school principals and positively influence leadership formation and support within Catholic school systems across the country.

### **Statement of the Project**

This study sought to understand why principals choose to stay in their principal positions in the ADLA. The study employed interviews with seasoned principals who have spent 5 or more years in their positions.

### **Research Questions**

Two research questions guided this investigation:

- RQ1: According to veteran elementary Catholic school principals in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, what factors contribute to their retention as principal?
- RQ2: What recommendations do veteran, Catholic elementary school principals have for the system to better support them and increase retention?

### **Research Site and Population**

The focus of this study was the ADLA school system, a large and predominantly urban system of schools. Additionally, the ADLA is the fourth largest diocese in the country. Data were collected from 11 lay school leaders who have served at least 5 years in the position of Catholic school principal. In-depth one-on-one interviews with each principal served as the methodological approach to collecting the data. Specifically, I sought to understand both the personal and professional history of each participant. Additionally, I dove deeply into experiences of turmoil that may have caused them to consider leaving the position and what, specifically, kept them from doing so. Lastly, I gave participants an opportunity to reflect on how they feel this information could be useful to future principals moving forward, as well as to system leaders with respect to future principal formation and support.

### **Significance of the Study**

This study contributes to the discussion regarding the need for development in principal retention. As membership in religious communities in the United States is declining (Gibson, 2014), Catholic dioceses need both lay teachers and administrators to assume the all-encompassing leadership positions in Catholic schools (Sabatino & Montejano, 2012). The pool of leadership candidates needs to embody the role of instructional, managerial, and spiritual leader, as defined by Ciriello (1996). Research also confirms that leadership is second only to classroom instruction as an influence on student learning (Seashore-Louis, Leithwood,

Wahlstrom, & Anderson, 2010). With leadership being one of the most important factors contributing to a school's success, it is imperative that we understand what causes principals to continue to do their job, even in the midst of overwhelming responsibilities. The data gathered in this study have the potential to influence the way Catholic diocesan leaders support current and future Catholic school principals so as to increase overall Catholic school principal retention.



## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

This study examined Catholic school principal retention in the Los Angeles area. There are many studies pertaining to principal turnover in both the public and private school sectors; however, almost no research focuses on principal retention. Much research has been conducted in an effort to understand why principals leave, but very little has been conducted to understand why they stay. In facing such significant turnover among Catholic school principals, it is imperative that the gap in the research be filled in an effort to understand why some principals stay when so many leave. This new understanding will help to create and implement new systems of support for school principals that contribute positively to retention.

In this literature review, I first seek to define the role of the school principal in an effort to build a common understanding of the demands of the job and how such responsibilities might relate to turnover. I then analyze literature pertaining to turnover among school principals and specifically discuss the factors that contribute to turnover in underserved schools and the effects turnover has on school communities. Next, I provide a brief overview of Catholic schools while examining both their organizational and unique leadership structures and how they are relevant to retention. I then discuss Frederick Herzberg's theory of motivation and how it can be applied to principal retention. Last, I review the limited existing research on the retention of principals in both the public and Catholic sector to underscore the importance for my own research.

### **Defining the School Principal**

School principals play a central role in education and are responsible for the overall well-being of the school. They are seen as administrator, building manager, politician, and change agent. It is necessary to understand the pivotal role principals play in school communities in

addition to the specifics of their day to day profession in order to better understand turnover as a whole and it can be reduced.

### **Principal as Instructional Leader**

Teaching and student learning are the most important aspects of a principal's job. Principals are responsible for moving instruction forward; they are considered the lead teachers of the school, and therefore are expected to be the most knowledgeable when it comes to best practices in curriculum, instruction, and lesson design. Principals must consistently attend to classroom instruction with regard to support for both teachers and students while simultaneously balancing all other instructional responsibilities. A mixed methods study conducted in a mid-sized urban school district with a focus on 42 different principals found identified the following instructional responsibilities: conducting classroom observations, leading faculty meetings and professional development, supporting accomplished teachers, providing guidance and support to struggling teachers, leading curriculum adoption and implementation, and using data to inform school practices and procedures (Spillane & Hunt, 2010).

Principals are also responsible for establishing a school wide vision that is committed to high standards and the success of all students while simultaneously cultivating a climate conducive to learning for both teachers and students (The Wallace Foundation, 2013). Strong principals have a substantial impact on the teachers in their schools, where ineffective principals can have the opposite effect and contribute to high teacher turnover (Branch, Hanushek, & Rivkin, 2012). Maintaining a healthy school environment is imperative for the school principal. According to Vanderbilt researchers, a healthy school environment is characterized by basics such as safety and orderliness as well as less tangible qualities such as supportive and responsive attitudes toward students and teaching (Goldring, Porter, Murphy, Elliott, & Cravens, 2007).

## **Principal as Community Engagement Leader**

Just as building a healthy school environment is pivotal to a school's success, so is facilitating an atmosphere that feels like a community. The most effective principals focus on building a sense of community at the school site by engaging both parents and the neighboring community. For example, in a mixed methods study conducted over 5 years in nine states and 43 school districts, Seashore-Louis et al. (2010) found that in schools with higher achievement on math tests, teachers tended to share in leadership and believed that parents were involved with the school. Fostering and maintaining positive relationships with parents and community members can benefit the school in a variety of ways.

For example, building relationships with businesses and individuals in the neighboring community can bring great resources to the school in the form of both donations and talent. Thus, a vital part of a principal's job is nurturing these relationships. Similarly, a principal must also cultivate strong, transparent relationships with the school parents. They must develop a system that streamlines communication and makes procedures and practices of the school cohesive and understandable. Principals are on the frontline of disciplinary issues, mediating between students (which oftentimes constitutes communication with their parents), supporting teachers in working with difficult parents, and ensuring that information is communicated to parents in a consistent, transparent manner. Building healthy relationships with parents makes managing all other issues involving teachers and students a lot easier. Spillane and Hunt (2010) found that some principals can take a more indirect route to leading and managing curriculum and instruction, such as focusing on building a school environment in which mutual trust and respect support healthy staff and stakeholder interaction, ultimately leading to more effective teaching and learning.

## **Principal as Managerial Leader**

Despite school principals' desire to work predominantly on school instruction, their managerial responsibilities almost always pervade and consume the majority of their time (Cuban 1988). For example, an observational study of five elementary school principals found that they spent the bulk of their time on administrative activities such as unscheduled meetings (32.5%), desk work (18.6%), scheduled meetings (10.3%), and phone calls (8.0%), and very little time observing teachers (2.5%) or teaching (1.9%; Kmetz and Willower, 1982). According to Cuban (1988), conventional managerial tasks as well as clerical work can be collapsed under the category of *administration*. He added that these tasks aim at maintaining the stability of the organization, including preparing reports, constructing schedules, discipline, meeting with parents, solving non-instructional problems for all stakeholders, and the more common managerial duties of budgeting, making personnel decisions, and maintaining the building.

Added to such tasks is another important managerial aspect of a principal's job, which lies in building relationships with all stakeholders, including managing these relationships and the people on site. Part of this process entails cultivating leadership among the school faculty and staff. Principals who receive high marks from teachers for creating a strong climate for instruction receive even higher marks for cultivating leadership among the faculty. In fact, effective leadership from all sources, including the faculty, has been associated with better student performance on math and reading tests (Seashore-Louis et al., 2010). Building the faculty's collective capacity allows the principal to delegate responsibilities. The principal is then responsible for holding individuals accountable, meeting expectations, and continuing to foster a professional community among all faculty and staff. Although sometimes this can mean

developing leaders, it can also mean mediating among colleagues, teachers, and parents, as well as disciplining faculty and staff that are not meeting expectations.

A significant part of any school principal's job is ensuring adherence to the school's governing document, typically a parent and/or student handbook. A principal is responsible for reviewing or rewriting the document to ensure that it remains effective and improves the overall quality of education that students are receiving. It is also the principal's job to ensure understanding of these policies and procedures by faculty, staff, students, and parents, and hold all stakeholders accountable for following them. Additionally, principals are also expected to adhere to policies and regulations set forth by their district and state, which could have implications on school scheduling, curriculum, instruction, hiring and/or firing practices, and the school's budget. When principals come together for district meetings, for example, more often than not these meetings concentrate on the new or revised directives needing implementation. Some of these policies may even change quite frequently, necessitating the importance of a principal staying up to date with the newest or latest revised regulations that will ultimately affect their schools (Cuban, 1988).

### **Principal Turnover**

Research has argued that due to the overwhelming, growing responsibilities given to principals, along with other factors, many principals are pushed to their breaking points, resulting in increased turnover. Schools across the country have experienced significant rates of principal turnover for some time. At both the national and state level, principal turnover is at an alarmingly high rate. Research has found that school leadership in the U.S. is in crisis (Hargreaves & Fink, 2011). For example, average public-school districts across the United States lose anywhere from 15-30% of principals annually (Béteille et al., 2012). Not unlike the public sector, in the private

school sector, NAIS (2019) projected that 68% of United States independent school heads plan to retire or change jobs by 2019. We are now in the midst of this transition and the numbers are projected to increase as those who delayed retirement in response to financial crisis begin to leave their jobs. An effective school principal is integral to a school's success, but a principal cannot possibly create substantial change within a school community in just a year or two because it takes an average of 5 years to mobilize a vision and improve teaching quality (Hornig et al., 2010). Thus, high levels of turnover can be extremely detrimental to school communities.

### **Factors Contributing to Turnover**

Researchers have identified several characteristics relating to principal turnover; among these characteristics are sex, age, and experience. Fuller, Young, and Orr (2007) used a stability measure defined by the number of years that principals stayed in the same school and found that among the cohort of principals who started in 1996, female principals were 50% less likely than male principals to still be principals after 5 years. Similarly, Solano, McDuffie, Farley-Ripple, and Bruton (2010) found that male principals in Delaware public schools stayed 0.4 of a year longer than women in their schools. With regard to age, Fuller et al. found that younger principals were 2.6 times more likely than older principals to be principals after 10 years. , Unsurprisingly, Solano et al. had similar findings in that principals who were older were 65% more likely to leave and retire than younger principals. Research has also demonstrated that more experience equates to more longevity in the principal position. For example, in a study of Missouri principals, those principals with more experience were three times more likely to stay in the same position as compared to principals with less experience (Baker, Punswick, & Belt, 2010). Because these studies are quantitative, unfortunately there is no definitive causality or reasoning provided to explain the occurrence of higher turnover with gender and age. One can

speculate, however, that older principals more often than not have more experience and might be better prepared to handle the many challenges that come with the position and less likely to leave in the midst of chaos or obstacles.

Characteristics of the principal position as a whole have also been cited as predictors for turnover. The ever-changing job description and increased administrative duties, for example, lead to increased stress and turnover. The school principal has a multitude of responsibilities and such amplified demands overshadow their original purpose, namely to promote learning and increase effective instruction (Norton, 2002). Oberman (1996) spoke to principals who explained that the new work, including added administrative duties and community relations, overwhelmed them with central office demands that conflicted with local priorities and policies and kept them from being responsive to more significant needs on site. As a result of these increasing demands, many principals often leave their positions in seek of other opportunities.

Of all the issues reviewed regarding principal turnover, salary is discussed most frequently. Principals with higher salaries than their peers in the same labor market appear more likely to stay longer and less likely to be unstable (Belt, 2009; Baker et al., 2010). In a study of principal movements in Missouri, analysis found that with each move a principal made, they saw an average of 5% increase in their salaries (Baker et al., 2010). Cullen and Mazzeo (2007) had similar findings in Texas where principals leveraged school changes to increase their salaries.

The most significant predictor across all research regarding turnover is almost always related to the demographics of the school along with the academic achievement of its students. In Chaplin Partlow and Ridenour's (2008) analysis of principal turnover, the only predictor variable that was statistically significant was student achievement scores. As the percentage of students who passed fourth grade Ohio reading and math achievement tests increased, the frequency of

principal turnover decreased. Thus, the findings suggested that when students are achieving, principal retention improves. The evidence on student socioeconomic status and race/ethnicity is relatively consistent across the research and indicates that lower performing, under resourced schools are subject to the highest principal turnover.

### **Turnover in Underserved Communities**

Historically, schools in low-income communities have suffered more turnover than those in more affluent areas. The research indicates that principals are more likely to leave schools with higher proportions of minority and low-income students. In a study conducted across three Midwestern cities, Bent (2009) found that schools in urban settings with higher percentages of Black students had an increased likelihood of principal instability. This instability of leadership seen predominantly in underserved communities is typically cited as an impediment when trying to improve schools. In a study conducted in Texas, Branch et al. (2013) found that schools serving low-income students were more likely to have first-year principals than principals who had been at the school at least 6 years.

High principal turnover is particularly detrimental for high-poverty schools because they are less likely to attract experienced and, thus, more effective principals (Béteille et al., 2012). For example, a study conducted in North Carolina uncovered the same trends, finding that when principals moved from their first school they usually moved into schools with significantly less poverty (Clotfelter, Ladd, Vigdor, & Wheeler, 2006). The implication with these transitions is that poorer schools typically end up with inexperienced leaders and the leaders they have ultimately move on to schools in more affluent contexts.

In a study conducted by Gates, Ringel, and Santibanez (2005) in Illinois and North Carolina, school characteristics played an important role in predicting principal transitions.



Specifically, the racial makeup of the student body was a significant predictor of the probability that the principal would change schools or positions. For example, in Chicago, principals in urban areas were found to be 50% more likely to switch schools than principals in suburban or other urban areas. In both states, the percent of the student body that was non-White was positively related to both the probability of changing schools and positions. The effects of principal turnover are significant, especially in disadvantaged communities.

Much of the turnover experienced in low-income communities can be attributed to the many challenges these communities face that are not seen in more affluent school communities, including but not limited to poor academic achievement, violence, drugs, low or lack of parent involvement, language barriers, lack of funding and resources, increased accountability due to poor school performance, and politically charged environments (Cooley & Shen, 2000). For example, Kimball and Sirotnick (2000) argued that changing demographics create the societal conditions that make urban schools a nightmare for principals. The researchers argued that the conditions of urban schools have become nearly impossible and the job of the principal in these communities is increasingly stressful. Although researchers agree that urban leaders face great challenges, many principals prefer less demanding schools that are populated with higher income students, higher achieving students, and fewer minority students (Branch, Hanushek, & Rivkin, 2009).

### **The Effects of Turnover on a School Community**

The most important of all of the roles of a principal is that of the instructional leader. Among school-related influences on student success, leadership is second only to teaching (Manna, 2015). Constant principal turnover creates an environment that is far less conducive to learning for teachers and students alike, strongly shaping the conditions for high-quality

teaching. According to Clark, Martorell, and Rockoff (2009), both teachers and principals become increasingly more effective in their first 3 years. Research estimates that it takes approximately 5 years to improve instruction and fully implement new policies and procedures to influence student achievement (Seashore-Louis et al., 2010). Therefore, when a principal leaves a school, it significantly interrupts the trajectory of the school as a whole.

Principal leadership largely contributes to student success, but in order to be effective it needs to be coherent and have long-term efforts. Several studies suggest that principal turnover can have a negative impact on student achievement. For example, Marzano et al. (2005) found a significant relationship between leadership and student achievement. In a study conducted by Branch et al. (2013), results indicated that highly effective principals raise the achievement of a typical student in their schools by between 2-7 months of learning in a single school year, whereas ineffective principals lower achievement by the same amount. The principal's influence on teaching and learning is largely indirect, however, because it lies in his/her ability to establish an effective and healthy school culture in which effective teaching and learning opportunities can occur (Hallinger & Heck, 1998). Establishing the aforementioned culture is arduous work and requires consistency, cohesiveness, and above all else, time. Therefore, excessive principal turnover is also often associated with inconsistencies in school policy and culture, leading to decreased teacher commitment, increased teacher turnover, and possible disruptions to a faculty's collective capacity (Ni, Sun, & Rorrer, 2015). Ultimately, principals who are strong, effective, and responsive leaders have the ability to inspire and enhance the abilities of their teachers and other school staff to do excellent work (Manna, 2015).

## **A Brief Historical Overview of Catholic Schools**

Not unlike the public sector, Catholic schools, too, have faced great hardships as a result of principal turnover. Understanding the complexity of the job of a Catholic school principal warrants an explanation of the background of Catholic schools as a whole and how their organizational structure differs from that of schools in the public sector. The United States Catholic school system was formalized in 1884 by the United States Council of Catholic bishops, which mandated that all parishes build Catholic schools to serve the influx of immigrant Catholic children (Bauch, 2014). These families, primarily from Germany and Ireland, desired an education for their children that was free from the Protestant theology that dominated public education at the time (Hunt, 2000). Parish schools were staffed primarily by religious orders of nuns and focused on the teachings of the Catholic church. By the 1960s, Catholic schools continued to serve minorities and the poor, predominantly in urban areas (Brinig & Garnett, 2012). Between the 1960s and today, however, the cost to operate Catholic schools has doubled. Tuition has soared, parish subsidizing has decreased, teachers' salaries have increased, and the impact of the Catholic Church's various sexual abuse scandals has negatively affected school enrollment and sustainability (DeFiore, 2011).

Catholic schools today make up the largest non-public school systems in the country. As of June 2020, there are 6,183 Catholic schools, with a total student enrollment of 1,737,297 (NCEA, n.d.c). According to the National Catholic Education Association (NCEA, n.d.b), U.S. Catholic school enrollment reached its peak during the early 1960s when there were more than 5.2 million students in almost 13,000 schools across the nation. Shortly thereafter in the 1970s and 1980s, Catholic schools saw a dramatic decline in both the amount of schools and student enrollment. In the 10 years since the 2008-09 school year, 1,336 schools were reported closed or

consolidated, and the number of enrolled students declined by just over 19%, with the most serious of the enrollment decline affecting Catholic elementary schools (27.5%).

### **The Organizational Structure of Catholic Schools**

Catholic schools have a distinct mission and organizational structure. The primary mission of Catholic education is deeply rooted in teaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ with the intention of forming Christian adults to be witnesses to their faith. Catholic schools are called to be exemplary models of academic excellence and faith development (Kealey, 1992). Spiritual leadership is central to the identity of the Catholic school. The majority of Catholic elementary schools are parish-based or parochial schools<sup>6</sup>.

The parish-based school principal serves as the operating officer of the school, responsible for the management of programs, budget, students, and staff. The pastor of the associated parish supervises the principal and has all authority over the school (Code of Canon Law, 1983). Catholic school principals of parish-based schools tend to operate in isolation and must effectively engage and collaborate with their pastors who hold governance authority over their schools. The diocesan superintendent plays an advisory role wherein he or she collaborates with the site leaders in areas such as mission, marketing, and Catholic identity, but each school generally operates as an independent entity facilitating its own school programs. Therefore, all operational functions rest with the principal and the pastor as holding the final decision-making power.

Catholic schools were founded on a financial model that relied heavily upon a nearly free labor force of nuns and brothers (Bauch, 2014). The population decline of religious orders has necessitated the hiring of lay personnel who command fair market wages (Youniss & McLellan, 1999). In present times, even when Catholic schools are able to pay their lay faculty and staff,

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<sup>6</sup> Ownership by the local diocese or a religious order and affiliated with the church on site.

they cannot afford to pay at the same rates as the local public schools, which creates increased difficulty in attracting and retaining high quality personnel.

### **Leadership in Catholic Elementary Schools**

The Catholic school principal shares the managerial and instructional leadership roles of the public school administrator while also serving as a spiritual leader (Ciriello, 1996). The Catholic school principal's role as a spiritual leader is a significant factor in the overall vitality of the school. The principal must foster both the religious and academic mission of the school (Earl, 2005). Hobbie, Covey, and Schuttloffel (2010) found that teachers who perceived their schools as having a high level of vitality also had a principal who safeguarded the school's mission. The teachers in this same study also perceived that a school with effective leadership simultaneously had a strong Catholic identity. The *National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools* further affirmed that Catholic school leaders are responsible for ensuring a strong Catholic identity and culture through the school that included faith-focused mission development; proper preparation of religion teachers; program and instruction consistent with the Church teachings; and the faith formation of staff, faculty, and parents (Ozar & Weitzel-O'Neill, 2012).

Catholic school principals are also subject to unique operation and governance challenges. Parish-based schools operate as individual school districts in that they create and maintain their own budgets, development, personnel, vendor contracts, and facilities. For example, Catholic school principals must facilitate their own development program so as to close the gap between tuition received and the actual cost to educate each child. School fundraising events can make up a portion of the fundraising goals, but the necessity for outreach to alumni and other stakeholders for donations is more vital than ever. According to the *International*

*Handbook of Catholic Education*, many Catholic schools are reporting an increase in non-tuition income, including donations from individuals and community businesses (Grace & O’Keefe, 2007). Those schools with the majority of students living at or below the poverty line report even greater increases in grants received. Therefore, the principals serving these schools must dedicate a significant amount of their time toward seeking and solidifying external funding to support the school’s overall operating budget. With the decline of enrollment, decreased subsidizing from parishes, and increased educational costs, many schools have had to close their doors.

An additional, unique governance challenge is that of the necessary interaction with the parish priest who is the ultimate authority of the school. Oftentimes this relationship between pastor and principal can become conflicting and result in principal turnover (Durow & Brock, 2004; Fraser & Brock, 2006). An ineffective, contentious relationship between the school principal and pastor can ultimately result in a lack of sustainability for the school; thus a trusting, cooperative relationship is essential (Ozar & Weitzel-O’Neill, 2012).

### **Conceptual Framework**

Most of the research on principal turnover and retention is not overtly guided by theory or theoretical tools for understanding the problem. In this study, however, I draw on Herzberg’s two-factor theory of job satisfaction to understand why principals might stay, despite challenging circumstances. This theory discusses motivation in the work place, and what humans need in order to remain satisfied in their work environments and ultimately, their lives.

#### **Herzberg’s Two-Factor Theory**

Frederick Herzberg developed his two-factor theory, also referred to as the dual factor theory, in 1959 with the publishing of his book *The Motivation to Work*. In his book, Herzberg interviewed 200 engineers and accountants wherein they were asked to describe “any kind of

story you like—either a time when you felt exceptionally good or a time when you felt exceptional bad about your job” (Herzberg, Mausner, & Snyderman, 1959, p. 35). Over the course of 12 investigations in similar organizations, Herzberg then classified the work dimensions into what he referred to as *motivators* and *hygiene factors*. Herzberg believed that we could not improve job satisfaction by improving any of the 10 hygiene factors, but rather only by increasing the six motivators because job satisfaction and job dissatisfaction result from different causes.

**Motivators.** According to Herzberg, satisfaction depends on motivators, which are defined as intrinsic to the job. From the satisfying events described in the interviews, Herzberg identified six motivators: achievement, recognition, work itself, responsibility, advancement and growth. Herzberg claimed that the absence of motivators would not necessarily lead to job dissatisfaction, but also it would not lead to job satisfaction. This is due in part to Herzberg believing that job dissatisfaction is not the opposite of job satisfaction and it is possible to sit somewhere in between the two. This understanding is essential to my study in that it could possibly provide an explanation for the retention of principals despite overwhelming responsibility and stress; principals choosing to stay on the job does not necessarily equate to job satisfaction (Herzberg et al., 1959).

**Hygiene factors.** Herzberg argued that hygiene factors are extrinsic to the job itself. When the employees in Herzberg’s study spoke of experiences where they felt exceptionally bad, they spoke of the following factors: company policy and administration, supervision, relationship with supervisor, work conditions, salary, relationships with peers, personal life, relationships with subordinates, status, and security. These events are referred to as hygiene factors and primarily occur in the work environment itself, whereas motivators are more directly related to

employees' states of mind. Herzberg called them hygiene factors because they serve primarily as preventives to job dissatisfaction (Ozguner & Ozguner, 2014). The six motivators and seven hygiene factors essentially work in two different realms in affecting job attitudes (Smerek & Peterson, 2006; see Table 1).

Table 1

*Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory Principles*

Job Dissatisfaction Influenced by Hygiene Factors	Job Satisfaction Influenced by Motivation Factors
1. Working conditions	1. Achievement
2. Interpersonal relationships	2. Recognition
3. Personal life	3. Responsibility
4. Base pay, benefits	4. Work itself
5. Policies & administration	5. Advancement
6. Job Security	6. Personal growth
7. Supervision	

*Note.* Adapted from *The Motivation to Work* (2nd ed.), by F. Herzberg, B. Mausner, & B. B. Snyderman, 1959, New York, NY: John Wiley & Sons. Copyright 1959 by the authors.

**Herzberg's theory and principal retention.** As per Herzberg's theory, hygiene factors are essential in order to keep a reasonable level of satisfaction among employees. Although the factors do not always result in satisfaction, their absence can cause dissatisfaction. Motivational factors are inherent to the workplace and increasing them can generate a satisfaction level among employees. However, a decrease in motivational factors does not necessarily cause dissatisfaction among employees. Therefore, according to Herzberg's theory, school systems should pay particular attention to motivators and ensure not only that they are increasing, but also that hygiene factors are also present. Both work in tandem to ensure satisfaction among employees, and the lack of some might explain the dissatisfaction among the many principals that quit their jobs annually (Herzberg et al., 1959).



## **Herzberg's Theory Applied in Existing Educational Research**

In a mixed-methods study conducted by Wang, Pollock, and Hauseman (2018), Herzberg's theory was used to shed light on the ways hygiene and motivating factors affect principals' job satisfaction in the context of their work intensification. The study used both focus groups and an online survey consisting of 60 questions focusing on pertinent issues affecting school principals such as use of time, accountability and external influences, challenges and possibilities, well-being, job satisfaction, and demographic data. The survey was distributed to Ontario Principals' Council members and the researchers received 1,423 valid surveys back.

The findings of the study suggest some consistency with Herzberg's findings in that in order to increase job satisfaction among school principals, the greater governing body (i.e., the school district, the state) should place greater emphasis on improving the quality of principals' work through opportunities for principals to assume greater responsibility with increased autonomy, recognition for work and achievement, a louder voice in decision-making, and more time for instructional leadership. These findings demonstrate great parallels to Herzberg's motivator factors with regard to recognition, the work itself, achievement, and personal growth (Wang et al., 2018). Wang et al. (2018) also found that in order to reduce job dissatisfaction, employers should direct more attention to the job environment itself with regard to systems of support, policies and initiatives, respect, and positive work relationships. These findings mirror Herzberg's hygiene factors of working conditions, interpersonal relationships, policy and administration, and supervision.

### **Principal Retention**

Many of the reasons why school principals leave their positions have been identified, and although it is important to study these reasons, it is just as important to study why principals stay

in order to increase retention efforts as a whole. Although the body of literature on principal retention is small, it provides valuable information pertaining to why principals leave and what practices or incentives, specifically, can contribute to their staying. For example, in a survey of 190 individuals to determine the leading recommended change to the principals' job, Winter, Rinehart, and Muñoz (2002) found that assigning some of the administrative duties to other personnel could be beneficial. Researchers have argued that leadership should not rest solely in the hands of one but instead should be shared and embodied by everyone (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006). On a similar note, a mentoring network of principals along with professional development and continuous support is crucial in the sustaining of quality, effective principals (Zellner et al., 2002). Researchers agree that principals need to be provided with job-embedded, ongoing, tailored professional learning and coaching that can increase self-efficacy and competence while simultaneously reducing the likelihood that the principal will leave (Tekleselassie & Villareal, 2011).

### **Catholic School Principal Retention**

Catholic school principal retention is unique to the private sector due to the differences in the environment and the job itself as compared to principal retention in the public sector. For example, many Catholic school principals stay on the job due to their commitment to Catholic education and the mission of the church as a whole. They would argue that their job is rather a *vocation*, or a spiritual calling by God to serve in the school's community. Oftentimes Catholic school principals' faith is at the center of their retention. Similar to public school principal retention, Fraser and Brock identified financial security, engaging and diverse day to day responsibilities, and a valuable staff as several factors that contribute to the retention of Catholic school principals (Fraser & Brock, 2006). In conducting interviews with principals from both

the public and Catholic sector, Drago-Severson (2012) found that principals need support in order to manage the various challenges of their role in order to avoid burn out. Similarly, Fraser and Brock (2006) also suggested offering more support for Catholic school principals from their employing agencies, such as more clearly defined role expectations and the identification of incentives and disincentives specific to the role of Catholic school principal.

**Catholic school principal turnover.** Research shows that Catholic school principals grow frustrated over feelings of isolation, overwhelming responsibilities, inflexible work schedules, and loneliness (Drago-Severson, 2012; Durow & Brock, 2004). Similarly, in their study of Australian Catholic school principals, Fraser and Brock (2006) found that principals reported feeling challenged by the lack of support from their district, difficulty with parents and their pastors, a sense of isolation, overwhelming responsibilities, and low compensation. Durow and Brock (2004) also studied principal attrition and were able to identify themes relating to job dissatisfaction from the interviews they conducted. These themes included personal needs, such as a more convenient work location or more flexible hours, career advancement, and conflict in their professional lives, including challenges with the pastor or governance model.

### **Conclusion**

Principal turnover is one of the leading problems facing schools across the country. The existing research provides various reasons as to why turnover is occurring, but it fails to shed enough light on why those who choose to stay are doing so. Although understanding turnover can help inform future retention efforts, the voices of those who stay on the job are missing from the research as a whole. Herzberg's two-factor theory gives a framework for understanding job satisfaction and dissatisfaction, but also carefully identifies that there is an area in between the two. If many principals are somewhere in between satisfaction and dissatisfaction, then efforts

need to be made to increase the motivators, as Herzberg refers to them, and decrease the hygiene factors in an effort to increase principal retention. Understanding the reasons why principals stay may not only affect future hiring practices, but also provide innovative systems of support for principals.

## CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Over the last decade the ADLA has been experiencing significant principal turnover. There are many reasons why principals leave as demonstrated in the previous chapter, yet there are very few studies on reasons why some choose to stay (Fenwick & Pierce, 2001; Gates et al., 2003, 2006; Johnson, 2005; Kennedy, 2000). This study sought to fill part of the gap in the research and give voice to those who have served as principals for 5 years or longer in economically disadvantaged Catholic schools. Additionally, this study strove to understand the primary factors contributing to long-term principal retention in the ADLA. The purpose of the study was to generate data that can be used to inform future hiring practices regarding Catholic school principals and positively affect leadership formation and support within Catholic school systems across the country.

This chapter outlines the research design, data collection, and analysis used in this study. The first section will explain the rationale for a qualitative, phenomenological approach in effectively answering the study's research questions. Then the approach to data collection, including the sample and site selection, and analysis will be established. Finally, the chapter will close with an explanation of the ethical considerations of this study.

### **Research Questions**

This study investigated the following research questions:

- RQ1: According to veteran elementary Catholic school principals in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, what factors contribute to their retention as principal?
- RQ2: What recommendations do veteran, Catholic elementary school principals have for the system to better support them and increase retention?

## **Research Design and Rationale**

A qualitative, phenomenological approach was deemed the most appropriate research method to explore the factors contributing to Catholic elementary school principal retention. This method allowed for an in-depth, rich understanding of the phenomenon of turnover and retention and how veteran principals make sense of it. Phenomenological studies are a design of inquiry stemming from psychology and philosophy in which the researcher investigates individuals' lived experiences regarding a phenomenon as described by the individuals themselves (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The study was phenomenological in that it sought to acquire information directly from its participants in understanding their views and experiences related to the phenomena of turnover and retention. In particular, this research sought to better understand retention and why some principals decide to stay given the context and presence of overwhelming turnover. The study was qualitative in that it did not seek to identify the problem, but rather to answer why the problem is occurring and delve deeper into individuals' feelings as to why they stay when so many leave. Although it would have been possible to survey veteran principals, a quantitative study would have limited the ability to dive deeply and holistically in an effort to understand veteran principals' experiences, understandings, and feelings toward retention and turnover within their school system.

## **Data Collection Methods**

### **Site Selection**

The chosen site was the ADLA system of schools. Although it is a private Catholic school system, it is the fourth largest system of schools<sup>7</sup> in California, encompassing approximately 250 schools and serving approximately 80,000 students in Southern California, with one third of those families living at or below the poverty line and nearly 70% from ethnic

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<sup>7</sup> The ADLA is not a school district due to its unique governance model, but rather identifies as a system of schools.

minority households (NCEA, n.d.a). Like many school systems across the country, the ADLA suffers from significant turnover, having lost approximately 25% of its elementary school principals at the end of the 2017-2018 academic year.

The ADLA has a Department of Catholic Schools (DCS), which includes a superintendent of schools, two deputy superintendents (one for high schools and one for elementary schools), and 11 assistant superintendents. The DCS serves all schools and pastors as an overarching system of support. Their organizational mission has three pillars: faith formation, academic excellence, and stewardship. The mission of the organization as a whole is that of strong leadership and continuous growth.

### **Sample Selection**

I used purposeful sampling in sending a preliminary survey through Google Forms to all elementary school principals in the ADLA who had been in their position for 5 consecutive years or longer (see Appendices A & B). Due to the high rate of principal turnover, most research points to around 5-6 years of experience as ample qualification for being considered a veteran principal. The list was compiled with the assistance of the Elementary Deputy Superintendent, the DCS Database Manager, and the DCS Office Manager. The preliminary survey asked for principals' contact information, the number of years they have been on the job, if they had been principal in another school prior, if they were laypeople or members of a religious order, and what percentage of their students qualify for the National School Lunch Program (NSLP).

I initially sent the survey from my personal email address, which did not yield many responses. Principals receive many emails daily, most of which are spam or ads, and I suspect the low survey response was due to the principals not recognizing the originating email account. After allowing for an initial 2 weeks of survey response time, I sent a follow up email from my

Archdiocesan-issued email account with the survey embedded in an effort to collect more responses, which proved successful. At the end of the 3-week survey collection period, I narrowed down interested respondents using two key criteria: (a) the principal is not a member of a religious order and (b) at least half of the principal’s student body qualifies for the NSLP. It was important for me to recruit lay principals because they represent the majority of the principal population and have not taken religious vows that would determine their assignment in addition to the amount of time they would stay in an assignment. I prioritized principals serving in urban communities, represented by at least 50% of their students qualifying for the NSL program, because these communities are most afflicted and impacted by leadership turnover. Table 2 provides a brief overview of the preliminary survey responses.

Table 2

*Preliminary Survey Responses*

Total Surveys Sent	Total Surveys Received	Total Respondents Meeting Study Criteria
68	39	11

My initial goal was to interview 10-12 sitting principals because this study is very focused and felt I would reach a point of saturation relatively quickly given the amount of time I allotted per interview. Ultimately, I was able to interview 11 participants who met the study’s criteria. Additionally, according to the DCS, only 23 schools with veteran principals have at least 50% of their students qualifying for the NSL program. Therefore, 11 participants captured the ideas of half of the desired population.

Eleven survey respondents were sent a follow up email (see Appendix C) inviting them to participate in an interview and all 11 agreed to participate in the study. All 11 of the participants are considered veterans<sup>8</sup> in the school system. Although most of the principals already knew me

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<sup>8</sup> The superintendent indicated he determines a veteran principal to have served for 5 years or longer.



as a colleague to some extent, I used the follow up email as an opportunity to introduce myself as a researcher and convey the importance of the study. All 11 survey respondents became study participants and were interviewed in order to gather data that would inform answers to the research questions on principal retention. Table 3 presents an overview of the study’s participants.

Table 3

*Overview of Study Participants*

Interview Participant <sup>9</sup>	Sex	Age Range	Race	Years in Current Site	% Students Qualifying for F/RPL	Highest Educational Level**	Pathway to Principalship
Clare	F	35-40	Hispanic	12	80%	M.A.	Tapped by outgoing principal; VP at the same school prior
Anna	F	35-40	White	13	87%	M.A. (3); Admin. Credential	Tapped by outgoing principal; teacher at the same school prior
Quiteria	F	30-35	White	6	68%	M.A. (2); Admin. Credential	Tapped by school’s pastor; previously a teacher in the same school
Rose	F	35-40	Hispanic	7	80%	M.A.; Admin. Credential	Recruited by former Superintendent; previously a VP in a different school
Jeanne	F	40-45	Hispanic	8	86%	M.A.	Tapped by school’s pastor; previously a VP in the same school
Edith	F	35-40	Hispanic	6	82%	M.A. (2)	Tapped by outgoing principal; VP at the same school prior
Catherine	F	30-35	Asian	7	50%	M.A. (2); Admin. Credential	Tapped by outgoing principal; VP at the same school prior
Florian	M	40-45	Asian	9	55%	M.A.	Recruited by pastor; previous administrative roles elsewhere

(continued)

<sup>9</sup> Pseudonyms are used in place of participants’ names throughout the document to ensure confidentiality of participant identity.

Interview Participant <sup>9</sup>	Sex	Age Range	Race	Years in Current Site	% Students Qualifying for F/RPL	Highest Educational Level**	Pathway to Principalship
Rita	F	60-65	African-American	30	62%	M.A. (2)	Recruited by leadership; previous administrative roles elsewhere
Philomena	F	35-40	Hispanic	8	84%	M.A. (2)	Tapped by outgoing principal; VP at the same school prior
Marta	F	40-45	Hispanic	9	95%	B.A.	Tapped by outgoing principal; teacher at the same school prior

*Note.* All participants hold a valid California teaching credential.

### Site Access

The ADLA is my employer and I am currently in my 4th year of serving in the position of principal but in my 10th year with the school system. Over the years I have built relationships with principals throughout the Archdiocese as well as gatekeepers such as the former superintendent, deputy superintendent, program leaders, and several assistant superintendents. After briefly discussing my research and plans with the Assistant Superintendent of Leadership, Growth, and Innovation in the diocese, she gave her support and indicated I should speak with the Deputy Superintendent of Elementary Schools and the Superintendent of Schools. I spoke with the Deputy Superintendent directly about my research and he also offered his support. Lastly, I emailed the Superintendent of Schools<sup>10</sup> to gain both his support and an understanding of how many years he constitutes makes a Veteran principal; he also gave his support via email. I let all of these individuals know that I would gladly provide feedback from the research conducted at the conclusion of my study with suggestions for retention based on my findings. In addition to gaining approval and encouragement from these key stakeholders and my superiors, I also spoke casually with veteran principals at district-level meetings throughout the previous

<sup>10</sup> The Superintendent of Schools in discussion transitioned out of his position in June of 2019, but approval was received by the current Superintendent (19-20AY) to continue conducting the study.

year so as to informally gauge interest in participation; during these conversations, the topic of my study was met with excitement.

## **Methods**

All of the interviews ranged from 50-80 minutes long. The data collection approach included the use of open-ended, semi-structured interview questions so as to better understand the participants' perspectives on retention and turnover (Creswell, 2009). Semi-structured interviews are an appropriate instrument for collecting qualitative data because they allow the researcher to more closely understand the participants' ideas (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Additionally, this approach allows the researcher to use an interview protocol as a guide while simultaneously seeking clarification and/or elaboration throughout the interview as needed (Noonan, 2013).

All participants were given a letter that informed them of the purpose of the study and the role they would play in providing data for the research (see Appendix D). Additionally, participants were given an opportunity to ask questions before the interview began. After gaining participants' consent, the interviews were recorded on both a Sony digital audio recording device and an iPhone. During the interview, I used an interview protocol that used questions relating to the study's two research questions (see Appendix E). Prior to the interviews, the interview protocol was piloted to ensure that the questions were appropriate, were understandable, and addressed the research questions (Creswell, 2014). During the interviews, I took notes on anything that stood out to me at the time. Immediately following all interviews, I wrote a brief summary of some of the key themes I heard in addition to any other points that seemed meaningful or relevant.

## Data Analysis

The data analysis process was aligned with Creswell's (2014) model for qualitative data analysis, a logical deductive approach to analyzing qualitative data. This data analysis approach calls for the grouping of data based on common themes. Figure 1 demonstrates my data analysis process, as adapted from Creswell's model.

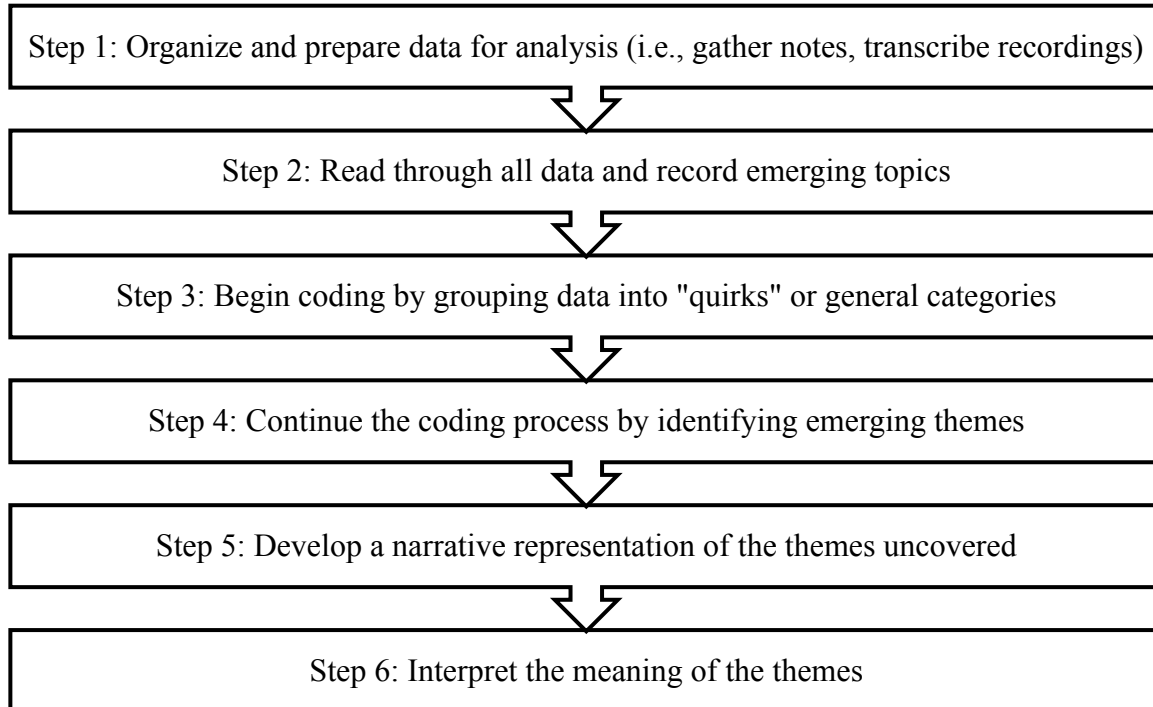


Figure 1. Model of qualitative data analysis. Adapted from *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (4th ed.), by J. W. Creswell, 2014, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications. Copyright 2014 by the author.

As depicted in Figure 1, the first step was to collect and organize all data, which included notes and interview recordings in preparation for transcription through Rev.com. While awaiting transcription, I listened to the audio-recorded interviews within 48 hours of the interview, recorded notes, and ensured new understandings were applied to the interview protocol for the next participant interview, if necessary. After the recordings had been transcribed, I read over them to both check for accuracy and record additional notes on emerging categories prior to uploading them into the data analysis software, Quirkos.

The coding process began by using Quirkos to chunk data from the interview transcripts into general categories that emerged from listening to the interview recordings and reading through the notes taken during and after the interviews. For example, every time a participant discussed their relationship with their pastor, I highlighted the data and dragged it into the category, “pastors.” The categories, or “quirks,” changed and/or grew more prominent the more data that was coded and added to them, thus solidifying the emergence of themes. This process was repeated after each interview. After all categories were finalized, the transcripts were reviewed again and re-coded according to established categories. I then went into each category and broke it down further by recoding its data into more specific descriptors that embodied what the participants were communicating. For example, in the “pastors” category, the data was broken down into further descriptors such as “trust” and “respect.” Based on these more specific categories, I was able to develop a narrative representation of the themes uncovered and interpret their meaning.

### **Role Management**

As a principal in the same school system as those I interviewed, it was of the utmost importance to position myself as a researcher and UCLA student before positioning myself as a principal. It was especially important to assert myself as a UCLA researcher so as to ensure all participants knew that this study was not conducted on behalf of the Archdiocese, because that misconception alone could have limited participants’ candidness. At the beginning of the interview, I asked all participants to try and forget that I was also a principal and instead assume that I knew nothing about what they were discussing. In this way, I attempted to elicit more detailed responses from them. Additionally, I ensured that all participants understood that their participation in the study was both voluntary and confidential.

My position as principal within the same school system as the participants worked to my advantage in that it helped me to create a more welcoming atmosphere for my participants. The participants knew that I could relate to much of what they were saying, therefore they seemed more inclined to open up to me about very difficult topics. In some cases, however, the participants would not go into detail in their responses because they assumed I knew enough about what they were saying due to my having served in the same capacity. In these instances, I probed them and asked them for clarification and/or elaboration in a manner that elicited more detailed responses.

At the end of the interview, it was important to me to praise the participants for their longstanding service to Catholic education and commend them for their retention. It was my goal to make them feel special by participating. I accomplished this by both explaining my purpose in conducting the study in addition to providing them with a \$20 Amazon gift card at the end of the interview.

### **Credibility and Trustworthiness**

As mentioned previously, one of the biggest threats to my study was reactivity and how participants would perceive me. My initial fear was that they would view me as a representative of the school system, which could have potentially inhibited their willingness to be open and transparent. For this reason, it was of the utmost importance that I presented myself as researcher first and explained the purpose of my study to the participants. Explaining the purpose behind conducting this specific study facilitated trust between me and the participants while simultaneously generating buy-in. The participants are also passionate about the Catholic school system and are concerned about the overwhelming rate of principal turnover. Therefore, by

engaging them in the study's purpose and explaining the potential impact of the study as a direct result of their participation and contribution facilitated increased trust and buy-in.

Another potential threat to my study was my own personal bias. As a principal myself I related to much of what the participants discussed. Additionally, participants felt they could relate to me and therefore were more apt to share their experiences and opinions candidly. For these reasons, it was imperative for me to remain neutral and play only the role of researcher so as to prevent my personal feelings or opinions from influencing the interviews or the data. In order to mitigate bias, I collected rich, thorough data and used direct quotations from interviewees in the analysis process. Additionally, I standardized my interview protocols and coding procedures so as to ensure systematic data analysis that did not allow for cherry picking of favorite quotations.

Lastly, I incorporated both inter-rater reliability and respondent validation methods. By having a colleague read through and code my data, I was able to see consistency across the themes he had developed in comparison to those I had developed, thus increasing the validity of the study's data analysis procedures. Additionally, I utilized respondent validation methods in a few ways. First, at the end of the interview process, I summarized the key ideas I heard and asked participants to indicate whether or not my summarization was accurate and, if not, to provide me with feedback or clarification. Additionally, I sent all participants transcripts from their interviews and asked for them to make any corrections or clarifications they felt necessary.

### **Ethical Considerations**

This study posed some ethical issues that included my role as a principal in the same school system as the participants. It was important for me to remind participants that their participation was completely voluntary and that they were not obligated to be involved.

Participants also signed an informed consent to be a part of the study. No identifying information was shared throughout the study and participants were consistently reminded of the confidentiality of their involvement in the study. All school site names and participants were assigned pseudonyms. All data collected was maintained on my personal password-protected device. Upon completion of this study and the dissertation process, I provided all participants and the representatives of the Archdiocese, including the Deputy Superintendent, with a copy of the work and then deleted all recordings and transcripts, as well as any documentation with identifying information.

### **Summary**

This qualitative, phenomenological study sought to understand the factors contributing to retention among elementary school principals in the ADLA system of schools. Through conducting thorough, semi-structured interviews, I gained a better understanding of why some principals remain in their positions despite very challenging circumstances and responsibilities. This understanding has the potential to inform future principal formation and retention efforts. The next chapter presents the findings from the research conducted through participant interviews.



## CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to examine the factors contributing to principal retention in Catholic elementary schools in the ADLA. A qualitative, phenomenological approach was adopted in order to understand the factors contributing to principal retention in the ADLA, in addition to hearing recommendations from sitting principals on how to better support them in the job. This chapter presents the findings that emerged from the data collected and analyzed from 11 in-depth interviews. Pseudonyms for the school sites and principals were created so as to ensure that the participants' identities were kept confidential. All of the participants were eager to participate in the study and hope that their contributions will serve as a catalyst for positive change in the overall system of schools.

When discussing the key factors related to their retention, almost all of the participants spoke of the autonomy they have in their individual school sites that ultimately was the result of a trusting, respectful relationship with their immediate supervisor, who in the majority of cases is a Pastor, or parish priest. Additionally, all participants have a strong connection to their community that fosters a sense of purpose and belonging. Similarly, all participants have a strong and committed connection to their faith that causes them to view their work as a *vocation*. Participants also noted ongoing collegiality and support within various networks as a key factor contributing to principal retention. Lastly, a correlation was found between principal satisfaction in their current positions and long-term job retention.

When asked to provide recommendations for the ADLA in better supporting their principals and increasing retention, participants had many creative ideas that have the potential to yield positive results. One of the most prominent findings was the desire for more ongoing and

effectively structured supports from the DCS. An additional finding was their belief in the necessity for increased principal training and transparency prior to one’s first year on the job.

The chapter is divided into three sections. First, there is a general overview of the eleven participants. Then, the research findings for each question will be presented separately. All of the findings presented serve to answer the following research questions investigated in this study:

- RQ1: According to veteran elementary Catholic school principals in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, what factors contribute to their retention as principal?
- RQ2: What recommendations do veteran, Catholic elementary school principals have for the system to better support them and increase retention?

### **Participants**

All 11 of the study’s participants are Catholic elementary school principals in the ADLA. Additionally, all participants serve low-income, marginalized communities wherein at least 50% of their students qualify for the Federal Free or Reduced Priced Lunch Program.

Table 4

#### *Interview Participants*

Interview Participant <sup>11</sup>	Sex	Age Range	Race	Years in Current Site	NSLP Percentage
Clare	F	35-40	Hispanic	12	80%
Anna	F	35-40	White	13	87%
Quiteria	F	30-35	White	6	68%
Rose	F	35-40	Hispanic	7	80%
Jeanne	F	40-45	Hispanic	8	86%
Edith	F	35-40	Hispanic	6	82%
Catherine	F	30-35	Asian	7	50%
Florian	M	40-45	Asian	9	55%
Rita	F	60-65	African-American	30	62%
Philomena	F	35-40	Hispanic	8	84%
Marta	F	40-45	Hispanic	9	95%

<sup>11</sup> Pseudonyms for the school sites and principals were created to ensure that the participants’ identities were kept confidential.

## Research Question 1: Findings

### **Finding #1 (RQ1): Being Trusted, Supported, and Respected by One's Immediate Supervisor, in Most Cases Being a Pastor, Is Integral in Principal Retention**

The majority of Catholic schools in Los Angeles (and throughout the United States) operate under a unique governance model wherein the principal's immediate supervisor is the pastor<sup>12</sup>. Although the majority of the participants' schools operate under the aforementioned organizational structure, two of the 11 participants' schools do not, while still maintaining an immediate supervisor of some kind. All of the participants in the study described supportive relationships with their supervisors<sup>13</sup>, although this support varied slightly from participant to participant. All of the participants seemed appreciative of having pastors and/or supervisors that were available if they needed to problem solve or test out ideas, but also allowed them, the principals, to be the ultimate decision-makers, thus trusting their experiences and judgment. The necessity of this kind of relationship is significant in that it empowers principals to do their job without micromanagement or interference, and contributes positively to their retention in that they are being treated like professionals and trusted to their jobs effectively.

All of participants described a relationship that is trusting and respectful, specifically when it came to the ways in which their supervisors support them and their decisions in challenging circumstances. For example, more than half of the participants described specific examples of when their pastors defended them in front of parents. The nature of this ongoing public support seems to foster an even more trusting relationship between the principal and

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<sup>12</sup> A pastor is the lead parish priest and serves as the head decision maker of the school; this person is also responsible for the hiring and re-hiring of the school's principal. The Catholic school principal answers directly to the parish pastor (Ciriello, 1996).

<sup>13</sup> Supervisors will be used interchangeably with pastors because nine of the 11 participants answer directly to a pastor, as well as in an effort to maintain participant anonymity.

pastor. In Anna's case, for example, the pastor's support served as a protective shield for Anna, not allowing room for disagreement from parents:

If I have a parent who says they're going to go to the pastor, I tell them go for it because they basically show up at his door and he says, "Whatever she says goes...I trust her ability to do her job and I support her in everything she does and all the decisions she makes. And so, you either agree with it or you can go somewhere else." So he's very hands off with me with regards to how I do my job, he never questions anything. I just love the fact that he supports me in what I do and he and I get along very well because of it.

Whereas some of the participants felt they had a strong relationship with their supervisor that in a few cases resembles a friendship, others' relationships were on an as-needed basis. Rita and Florian both described very strong relationships with their pastors that contributed to their feeling supported. Rita said,

It's the ability to be able to talk with them at any time of the day, call them, text them anything, and then also to be able to collaborate with them. Literally we're not two different people. We are a team trying to achieve the same goal.

Rita describes being able to depend on her pastor at any time of the day and being confident in having a shared vision with him. Florian feels similarly about his pastor:

I meet with him weekly without fail, more times if I need to. He texts me when he needs something, he'll email me. He'll call me and he feels comfortable with that. I think he texted me a while ago and he goes, "I really appreciate your friendship." He has different ideas, different things he wants to do. And he's been very good about sharing those with me and asking my opinion and everything.

The relationship Florian described with his pastor resembles a friendship in terms of the frequency with which they communicate and the way in which they actively seek and appreciate one another's feedback. Edith also shared that she has a very close relationship with her pastor where they meet once a month for dinner and he supports her with personal matters. She referred to him as her "sounding board," stating, "I think that's something...that we're there for each other." The way Edith described her relationship with her pastor also resembles a friendship in that she feels she can confide in him about challenges she is having outside of work.

Although the aforementioned three participants described very close friendships with their pastors, others described positive relationships that were more on an as-needed basis. Clare said quite simply, "When I need him, he's there." She went on to say:

If I did have a concern or if it was a family matter or a staff concern or a student concern where big decisions have to be made, then I do reach out to him and I do go over there and I talk to him and he advises me. I do feel like he supports me. Whenever I tell him I'm considering doing X, Y, Z... it's more times than not, "No, yeah, I support you." Or, "You're in good reason."<sup>14</sup> Or, "Yeah, you should do that."

Clare's relationship with her pastor, although supportive, differs from those of the previously mentioned participants in that she only interacts with her pastor when she needs to and not on a routine basis. Because the organizational structure of a Catholic school makes it so that the pastor is the final decision-maker in all circumstances, all of the participants noted having supervisors that trust their decision-making and allow them to be the final say as a key factor contributing to their retention. For example, even though she was not extremely close to her pastor, Jeanne stated:

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<sup>14</sup> The participant directly translated her pastor's words from Spanish, "Tienes razón," which is a common Spanish phrase that indicates "you're right" or that she had reason/made sense in her decision-making.

He hears me out...and he pretty much will say, okay, I will support you on this. Let me know if you need me to be here. He does so because there's times where parents have gone directly to him and not me. Before he makes any type of judgment, he'll come speak to me.

Although Jeanne is not necessarily close to her pastor, she does feel heard and respected by him in both his word and actions.

Many of the participants described their pastors as being very supportive and trusting of them, but not directly involved with the day to day operations of the school. For example, Clare stated:

I know he trusts me and I respect him for that. I wish he were here more. I wish the kids could see him and interact with him and just know him on that level, but for me as the administrator, I feel that he does trust me because if he didn't trust me then he would be a little, I would think, more concerned, asking questions, wanting to be involved in every single aspect, and he really hasn't been that way... Now I feel comfortable in saying that he trusts me and that's why he's not concerned about the state of the school.

Clare did not offer tangible examples of how her pastor trusts and respects her other than the fact that he allows her to do her job without interruption or extreme oversight, which she recognizes is not the case in all schools. Nonetheless, she did mention desiring more from him in terms of his presence on campus. However, participants frequently described this lack of physical presence at the school as something positive because it limits micromanaging and allows them to run the school without interference, especially by someone who many of them describe as not having the background knowledge or experience to know how to do the job to begin with.

Quiteria had a similar attitude to Clare when she described how her pastor is not physically present, but allows her to do her job freely:

He doesn't micromanage, he's not over very often. I wouldn't mind if he was over more. But I mean, I don't need him to...he doesn't know what I'm doing, like he doesn't know how to do this job. Let me do this part, you do that part. But yeah, he just pretty much lets me...he doesn't make me over explain why I'm doing something. I don't have to like prove to him why things are the way they are, why you should get this book series or why we're doing this calendar.

Quiteria, like Clare, would not mind if her pastor were on her campus more, but nonetheless values the space and freedom he gives her by allowing her to make the most important decisions for the school. Catherine explained that she was thankful to have a pastor who was interested in being more involved with the school, but still allows her to do her job freely:

He's also made it known that he wants to be a part of the school, but it's hard for him and he doesn't know how...so I'm helping him with that process. I'm glad that he's being very open with me about that, but also I'm thankful that I don't have a pastor who's here constantly and also telling me what to do. He understands that I've been here for a while and I know how to run the school and I go to him when there's any issues or things that he needs to know. But he's very laissez-faire and he's not like a hawk.

Ultimately, all principals felt that having the respect and trust of their supervisors was critical in not only their ability to do their jobs effectively, but also their retention. As Florian stated so directly, "My most important relationship is definitely with the pastor. I think, and I told my employees the same thing, if you can't work with the person who's in charge, it's better that you just leave."

**Financial support.** Although only half of the participants receive financial support of some kind from their supervisors, it is worth noting that receiving this financial support alleviates the principals' responsibilities in having to seek the financial support elsewhere, which can oftentimes be a taxing part of the job. The type of financial support participants received from their supervisors varied greatly from small sums here and there to more consistent, ongoing income. Whereas Catherine reported receiving a consistent income from the parish, "So every month he gives the school I think it's \$1,200...to help with the electric costs," Quiteria described a consistent annual contribution, stating:

So it's just not as much as we've had in the past, but I'm thankful that we get it. He always gives us...he's always late with it and it's like instead of like monthly, it's one like lump sum. It comes the following year for the previous year.

Others, like Anna, described receiving financial support on an as-needed basis and only in the case of a crisis:

He [the pastor] tells me and the bookkeeper both, "If you can't pay the bills, if you're not going to make payroll, just transfer the money." So whenever we are not able to meet payroll, which is usually our biggest stress, we just transfer from his account and then we try to eventually pay it back. But we always have that ability to do that, which is amazing. So he definitely is a big support.

Anna's ability to move money from the pastor's account to the school's account demonstrates the level of established trust between them. Whereas most principals do not have access to parish accounts or feel comfortable making such a request from their pastors, Anna has a relationship that allows her to do so and thus functions as a life raft when in financial strain. Rose also described financial support from her new pastor for the first time in the school's history:



In all the school years that the school has been open, this is the first pastor that has helped us. Not a big amount, but at least he's helped us with something because when I told him, "Look, I don't know what to do. Tell me what to do, I need help." He's like, "Okay, I'm going to help you." So he did help us.

Rose explained that her pastor's decision to help the school in a time of financial need demonstrated to her that he did value it when she felt that others who came before him had not. His contribution, however small, has fostered a greater relationship between them where they work in collaboration toward the same vision. Marta also recognized the efforts her pastor is making in order to provide her with financial support, even if in more nominal ways:

Last year he started by giving scholarships to a few of our students, something that has never happened. He also would like to begin some sort of envelope for the school where the community...has like a second collection and he gives us the money. And so he's trying, he wants to do a lot more.

Like many of the participants, Marta demonstrates immense gratitude for the money she does receive from her pastor because this is an increasingly rare occurrence in Catholic schools, with parishes' financial vitality shifting with a dwindling church-going population and less collections. Given the overwhelming financial stress associated with running an inner-city Catholic school, being able to lean on one's pastor, or supervisor, for financial assistance, even if very little, left participants feeling supported and accompanied by their pastors in the face of economic disparity.

**Sub-Finding #1.1 (RQ1): Principals' Ability to Operate Autonomously Is a Factor Contributing to Their Retention**

Each Catholic school operates as an individual, autonomous entity under the leadership of a pastor. In Catholic schools, executive governance vests authority in an individual, traditionally the pastor. Anna described a slew of new, unique initiatives she has implemented at her school site, stating, "I'm always about trying new things and doing new things and doing different things. That's another great thing about being in Catholic schools. We have that freedom to do that." She went on to say:

We have the ability and freedom as a Catholic school administrator to do that. When you're at a public school, you're really kind of mandated in what you do and how you do things. And here we just have freedom. Like I had my kids doing sewing and cooking and things that I'd have to get permission from multiple people to do in the public school system. Where here, if you said you want to do it, okay, let's do it. So...I think that's something that's nice about being in a Catholic school and having the freedom to do that. Anna described the variety of extracurricular activities her students are able to do, along with the many new educational initiatives, as a way demonstrating just how much freedom and autonomy she has. Many of the participants felt similarly to Anna in that they had the freedom to implement new instructional strategies, curriculum, and extracurricular activities without having to obtain approval first. Having supportive pastors therefore grants them the autonomy needed to make such decisions. Similar to Anna, Quiteria stated:

I was like, we're going to do brain breaks, and we're going to start sewing, and we're going to woodwork, and he [pastor] allows me to do what I want. I'm allowed to do that, or if I want to switch the textbook series, we're allowed to do that, if we want to do brain

breaks and teach for 45 minutes and then take a 15-minute break, we can do that, no one is telling us not to. The other day we did a climate strike. We like all walked out of school on Friday and marched around the school and held signs. We did all that and I didn't have to ask anybody, and in that there is a lot of freedom.

Anna was able to do the aforementioned activities because her pastor allowed her to; in her case the pastor is the only individual from whom she would need to seek consent. Participants described this level of autonomy as being truly empowering in that it gave them the opportunity to make new and exciting choices for their students' education and ultimately see their visions come to life. As Quiteria explained:

So the freedom is really beneficial in some ways, like if you have a vision, and you have a pastor who will let you do it, you can get a lot accomplished and there's very little red tape from my experience.

As participants noted, their autonomy is a combination of each school operating independently without a centralized district as well as a pastor who controls the school relinquishing authority to the on-site principal. Florian expressed that being a part of a Catholic school is what affords principal so much liberty on-site. He even described that one of the reasons he has noted principals leaving the position is feeling that autonomy being taken away:

Well, I think I have it because the pastor allows me to have it and most of our schools are autonomous in many ways. So I like the liberty to be able to make decisions quickly. And I think that's helped the school grow, definitely. One of the reasons why some of my colleagues already left is that they felt that the Archdiocese was trying to take away autonomy from the individual schools and become more systematic, more streamlined, like a public school would.

Florian articulated quite clearly just how much power pastors have in their ability to create autonomous environments that foster principal retention. Quiteria described this autonomy best by stating:

That's the weird thing about Catholic schools is that you're mostly only beholden to your parish. Even if DCS<sup>15</sup> says do this, and this, and this, and this, and if your pastor says no, or doesn't want to, you literally don't have to, which is wild. I mean, there's 208 schools kind of doing whatever the hell they want. I mean, I know we sometimes sure do whatever the hell we want it.

Quiteria asserted that even the DCS at the Archdiocese do not have as much power as the school's pastor, which grants principals a great deal of freedom. All of the participants expressed some level of gratitude for the autonomy they experience on a daily basis, but also recognized that the autonomy would not be present if not for the support of their pastors that allows them to be the primary decision makers with regard to the school. As Rose stated, "They [the parish] have never had any impact on the decision making of the school. We've been a parish school, but the school has been alone in decision making." Similarly, Marta stated:

He [the pastor] allows me to do whatever I need to do on this side. He doesn't interfere. I like that we are in autonomous school where they allow me to do what I need to do. I guess I'm grateful for them [DCS, Pastors] allowing us to run a school without constantly being over our shoulders and watching everything we do.

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<sup>15</sup> DCS (Department of Catholic Schools): An essential relationship exists between private Catholic schools and the DCS through the authority delegated by the archbishop. The DCS is a consultative body that works to serve Catholic schools by providing support in a variety of ways: professional development, legal, and human resources being some of the key areas.

## **Finding #2 (RQ1): A Principal's Connection to a School Community Fosters a Sense of Belonging and Purpose That Contributes to Their Retention**

Many of the study's participants have a strong connection to the communities they serve. The participants' connection to the community and the individuals within the community play a large part in their retention and commitment to the work itself. All of the study's participants used the words *school* and *community* interchangeably when discussing their school sites. For them, a community is not just the specific geographic region or town in which their school is located, but also all of the people in it, from their students to the parents. Anna said the students are why she became principal in the first place, stating, "That's one of the things that's keeping me from going into a different position." Anna described the fulfillment she receives from watching students grow older as they move up in the school and the joy she experiences as a result of being able to be a part of their journey every step of the way. Edith also spoke of her commitment to the students in the community, stating, "I'm here to do the best I can do for these kids." Edith is motivated each day to provide her students with the best possible education she can. When Catherine has a bad day, she says she will often go into the TK (transitional kindergarten) or kindergarten classroom and observe for as long as she needs until she feels ready to return to whatever was causing her stress. She said, "Sometimes I just need to see the kids and be reminded of the reason I am here. That always brings me back if I'm having those bad days."

The majority of the participants have been in their schools for many years and feel that the community is part of their family. For example, half of the participants worked in the school in a different capacity prior to becoming principal. In these cases, the participants felt a sense of purpose and belonging in their specific schools that gave them a vision once they became the

school's principal. Many of the participants reported staying on the job as long as they have because they are still actively working toward accomplishing said "vision," whether it be the implementation of a new instructional pedagogy or growing the school's enrollment.

Seven of the 11 participants served as teachers or vice-principals for several years in their schools prior to becoming the principal, which in all cases was the result of them being tapped<sup>16</sup>. Quiteria described the respect that has come from staying in the same community for so long in saying:

Longevity has really been to my benefit. I've taught their kids, or their grandkids, or their nieces or nephews. I've been here long enough to know what will fly, and what won't, and I think they just respect that I've stayed for so long.

Quiteria described her longevity as contributing positively to her relationships with members of the community, especially in having taught so many members of numerous families. In this way, she has earned the respect of families in the community because she has demonstrated her ongoing commitment to generations of family members.

In many of the participants' cases, the connection was also a result of being from the community itself. For Clare, her connection came as a result of being an alumna of the school:

For me personally, the reason why I took this position specifically is because of a personal connection, which is that I came [here] as a student. That was one of the main reasons why at that point I applied for the position of principal. I knew coming back to this community was always one of my goals.

Having been an alumna of the school, Clare made it a goal to return to the community and give back. Marta also explained that being an alumna was one of the key driving factors in bringing her to work in the school initially and continues to play a big part in why she stays:

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<sup>16</sup> Tapping is an informal recruitment mechanism of teachers to become principals (Myung, Loeb, & Horng, 2011).

I grew up in this neighborhood. I'm an alumnus of the school...so I'm invested in this community. I love the people I serve. I love this school. I love this community. I grew up here and I want to make sure it survives.

Marta is committed to her community because she is committed to the people within it and providing them with the best educational experience she can. Her goal is to ensure that it continues to thrive for their sake.

Several other participants described their connections to the community as a result of being raised in the same neighborhood, although they did not attend the school they now serve. For example stated,

I am born and raised and grew up here. I went to the local public schools and I know the community very well. I live like eight blocks away from here. I always had an instinct to come back and do something for this community.

Rita also lives in the same community as her school and though she did not always work there, she found her way back as the principal later on in life:

I just felt like I was home again. I knew some of the teachers already and some of the kids. Actually, [this] community is my community base because I live only about 7 minutes from here so I'm a part of this community. We all know each other and when there may be an event someplace or I'm in the grocery stores or anywhere I see quite a bit of my school families. I love the community.

Rita described her community with both a familiarity and comfort in calling her students and their parents her neighbors. Ultimately, she calls the community home and the people within it her family. Although not all of the participants are originally from the communities they are now serving, many of them do come from similar communities wherein their schools mirror the

demographics of their hometowns. For example, Jeanne described her connection to the community stemming from her ability to relate to the people and culture within it:

Well, I started in this kind of population, so I think I just fell in love with it. I just feel more comfortable here first and foremost. And second of all, I just know there's a lot of great need to have role models for the kids that they're going to be able to relate to culturally.

Jeanne's purpose in her community stems from her desire to give back to students who in many ways resemble her at a similar age. Likewise, Philomena also described an affinity for her school community because it largely resembled where she grew up:

I think because I grew up in that environment...this just seems very natural to me...to be in an environment where I believe I understand the situations that people are coming from and the struggles. But I also see the potential in kids and families and that they deserve to be as close to the playing field as their counterparts and other kids.

Although Philomena is not originally from her school community, she knew that she wanted to be a part of bringing quality education and opportunity to students in a vulnerable neighborhood similar to the one in which she grew up. Whether they were from the exact community they now serve or one like it, all of the participants are driven to serve their schools continuously because of their passion for creating lasting impact in disenfranchised communities. Almost all of them spoke of creating equitable educational opportunities and access for students from marginalized and under-resourced communities. This passion thus further fosters their sense of belonging and commitment to their communities, which ultimately lead to their retention in working continuously toward their goals.



All of the participants described their school communities as familial to some degree, which contributed to feelings of belonging. For example, Anna said,

Just that relationship that I have with the families and the kids is very, very rewarding.

Everyone who comes here from different schools say, “I have not found something like the way I feel with this community that we have.”

Anna explained that one of her employees is actually her children’s godparent, stating, “That’s why it’s so hard to leave. I mean, I have such a close-knit group... they’re like my family.”

Quiteria also described her community as family, stating, “But I just mean like that close-knit family feeling...like I really feel like I make a difference [here] in a way that I might not make a difference at my next school.” Thus, Quiteria made it clear that the sense of belonging she feels now is specific to her school community and she doubts the possibility of finding it in a different environment, thus contributing to her retention in the community she currently serves.

Florian was one of the few participants who is also involved in the Religious Education parish programs, to which he attributes his feeling closer to the community as a whole. He said:

I know everybody’s names, all the drama...and people come to me to talk. I enjoy that part a lot because it’s not just a school, it is a community. You walk around and you can sort of feel it, too. You can feel it...and that’s how [schools] are supposed to be.

Edith did not feel entirely connected to her community when she first became principal. As the years went on, however, she explained how that began to change:

I finally can say this is my home. I think one of the things that has made our community grow even more since when I walked in has been that familial aspect. And I think if you talk to the parents, that’s what they’ll tell you, that we’re all a family. So if anything’s happening to anybody, we’re always praying for everybody and there’s that feeling

of...you're at home. The relationships that I have with kids, with parents, with the teachers, with the supporting staff. I think that's probably the most important. It's a special place here. And I think that's what keeps people here.

Edith described her relationships with members of the community as mirroring that of family, which contributes to her sense of belonging and loyalty to the school as a whole.

Many of the participants indicated feeling a sense of purpose in their specific school communities. Some of them even articulated a vision for the school that they felt needed to be accomplished before they could move on. Catherine said, "I'm not quite done in making the school sustainable for the next person." Quiteria echoed this sentiment, stating, "It felt like it would be wrong to leave before I did enough to make the school better." So many of the participants felt this way as a result of having been teachers in their school sites prior to becoming principal and seeing the change that needed to occur first-hand, from instruction to leadership to school-wide procedures. Their own dissatisfaction with the way things were being done or their belief in being able to make it better than it was ultimately led so many of them to say yes to the principalship. This vision for the school's potential to be improved fostered a sense of purpose in their stepping into the principal position in their specific school sites.

For example, Clare initially had no interest in becoming a principal, let alone the principal of her school. In fact, she said she used to create lists detailing reasons why she should not pursue it. It was her sense of purpose in creating change from within that ultimately drove her to pursue and later accept the position:

There was a lot of reasons not to do it, but at that same time I felt like we didn't know where we were going as a staff or as a school. I don't know how to explain it, it was just very disconnected. As a staff member I felt like [trust] was something in our faculty that

was lacking; we didn't trust one another. On that aspect I could make a positive difference in this school in particular. Since I was able to observe that from the inside, then I kind of knew that was going to be my focus coming in...to build staff trust and support systems. Noticing that from the get-go and making that part of my immediate goal helped a lot with the transition.

Clare was motivated by the shortcomings she saw as a teacher in the same site, and felt driven to be a part of the positive shift in school culture. Similarly, Anna also described observing things as a teacher that clearly were not working at the school. She described the revolving door of principals and the lack of stability in leadership, thus preventing any real significant changes from happening. She said, "There was so much that needed to be done. I was able to do things for [my teachers] as an administrator that I didn't feel like were done for me." In this way, Anna articulated her purpose as a principal being derived from feelings she experienced as a teacher in the school.

Catherine described her experience as a teacher in the school and how it contributed to her wanting to see change come from within, stating, "I think it was more so I was a teacher here at this particular school and I wanted to see change within this school." Although she explained that she did not set out in her career to become an administrator, she did feel strongly that the person who took over the principalship in her school site should be someone who was already working in the school:

I don't want to be anywhere else but this particular school. And so, if someone in house who knows the school, the families, the culture of the school takes over, then we can transform it. There was so much potential. And so that was my purpose was to change it.

I feel like I came in innovative and wanted to make some changes, and I knew the changes coming from inside.

Catherine saw the potential in her school and felt a clear purpose to change it for the sake of those she had grown to love and care for as family. Not unlike Catherine's principal story, Quiteria also had no desire to become an administrator. However, the love for her school community coupled with the school's need for a principal ultimately led her to take on the position:

I was at a very disorganized school... I had a different principal every year for about 6 years; just constantly a different person in that office. And I finally said, if I'm not going to do anything about it then I can't complain...so I better put my money where my mouth is. When I took over the school it had been through a lot of administrative changes and enrollment had really tanked and people were leaving. The community wasn't where it could be. As I started to see it get better and better, I felt like I owed it to the school...to leave it better than [I] found it. I owe it to making this school better and the school has given me a lot that I wouldn't have had otherwise.

The majority of the participants felt the need to transform their specific school sites and an inability to leave the job until they had given the principalship everything they had to give. Rose described seeing the changes that have taken place since she became the principal as being a continuous driving force that has kept her on the job and motivated to continue:

That's why I think I stay at this school, too, because I know the situation of the school and what I need to continue to offer. I think also what's kept me here is seeing all the changes that I've done as an administrator. I think just seeing improvement overall

improvement as a school in academics, with colleagues, with the faith, and how things change from year to year and you're seeing that they're changing for the good.

Although she indicated that that she would be ready to walk away now if she needed to, Marta commented on the vision she had for the school when she took over initially:

One of my goals has been [that] I will leave this school better than I found it. And right now, if I give my keys to someone, this school is a hundred times better than the way I found it. And I can actually walk away happy and say it's going to survive.

This vision and purpose overwhelmingly drove many of the participants to take on the role of principal and continue to keep them on the job now. Philomena shared, "I don't want to be just content where we are and let the school just kind of plateau. Like I have to be very visionary and [ask] what does the school need now?." Florian described a time in his principalship when he felt as though he nearly walked away from the job; when asked why he decided not to leave, he said, "I felt like I wasn't done."

### **Finding #3 (RQ1): Identifying One's Job as a Vocation and Possessing a Solid Faith Foundation Is a Factor Contributing to Retention**

All of the study's participants described a strong, steadfast connection to their faith that contributes to their retention. Many of the participants described their work not as a job, but as a vocation, or a spiritual calling by God to serve in a distinct capacity (Fraser & Brock, 2006). For example, when discussing how she came to be principal of her school, Marta described being a principal as "God-sent," and said, "I believe in God and I know that things happen for a reason." Rose echoed Marta's sentiments in identifying God as the reason she is in her position:

I'm here for a reason. God has called me to stay in a Catholic school and to help these students. I see it more as a mission and not as a profession; a mission that I have to be

here because God sent me to this school or to a Catholic school to keep helping the students to grow in their faith. If their faith is strengthened and they have that faith, then eventually like my parents always said, if your faith is there, then everything else will come into place.

Similarly, Catherine said, “If I didn’t have a strong faith, I couldn’t get through the day, couldn’t get through these 7 years of being a principal.” Quiteria also described being a principal as a vocation and worries about what her life would be like if she were serving in the public sector:

...but it’s that feeling of vocation like I’m called to do this. That’ll be hard to find other places and that’s something that I worry about...like, will I feel as fulfilled? Right? Because they talk about how to be happy in work you have to feel fulfilled. I’m like, yeah, I’m doing God’s work, of course, I’m fulfilled.

Similarly, Edith discussed being a principal as a ministry<sup>17</sup> and described a mentor that she had early on in her career who told her something she would never forget; “If you’re in education, you’re not in it for a job and a paycheck. It’s a ministry that you do. Once you start thinking about it as a job, then you need to get out.”

Participants discussed the concept of fulfillment several times; many of them used the phrase “doing God’s work” to describe themselves and their jobs. For example, Anna said, “My faith surrounds everything that I do. I feel like all who work here in this school, and in Catholic schools in general, are doing God’s work.” Clare shared this same sentiment, stating, “I always remind myself...we’re doing His work. The people around us are doing His work, like the kids and the teachers and the families.” Rita described her faith similarly, describing it as what keeps her coming to work each day:

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<sup>17</sup> A ministry in the Catholic church is understood as the authorized service of God in the service of other.

It's my faith that keeps me going, keeps me here, and keeps me serving others. I think my faith is what actually keeps me here...and I think it's because I know the ending well. My thing is I know in the end only what I do for Christ will last. So my job is to serve and that's what I want to be...a server for all.

Many of the participants also noted that they could not imagine themselves working in the public or charter sector because of an inability to bring faith and God into the classroom and the day to day operations of the school. As Jeanne noted:

I think that's why I'm still here...because there is that faith base. I'm assuming if I were to go into the public school system and being the person that I am, that I do share my faith, I would have a hard time. I would probably be called in quite often because that's the first thing I would probably want to do because I'm so used to it. So...you taking it away from me would be miserable.

Jeanne went on to state that her faith makes it easier for her to handle the everyday challenges of her job, and without it she believes that she would have left her position a long time ago.

Similarly, Clare discussed being reluctant to initially work in Catholic schools due to the comparably low pay in comparison to the public sector, yet her desire to serve the Church and live out her faith ultimately proved stronger:

I knew I wanted to come back to Catholic schools, and it was that financial reason why I would even consider not being here at that time. It was the faith component that hit me on the head right away like, "You're not going anywhere. This is where you're meant to be." It is in those moments of being able to share your faith and being able to talk with Christ that keep me coming. When we go to church and the kids are singing...it's just to me the most beautiful thing in world.

Both Florian and Anna also described a brief interest in moving to the public sector for financial gain, but ultimately decided it was more important for them to live out their faith. Florian stated, “I would not work for this little money if I didn’t believe that there was a mission involved in this and I didn’t feel called to it.” Similarly, Anna said:

Obviously, I could go to public school and make much more money, but to be able to sit and have a conversation about God with students and about their faith...I would feel like a part of me was missing to not be able to do that in a public school.

Many of the participants described their faith as being at the center of their lives. It is the combination of both being able to live out their faith in their day to day lives, but also having the opportunity to share their faith and foster it in students that truly plays a part in their retention. Catherine said, “I love talking about God. When we have issues with discipline, we sit down and talk about what Jesus would do. I don’t see myself in a place where you can’t [do that].” Marta also attributed the ability to discuss her faith every day as affecting her retention:

That’s why I’m still here. One hundred percent. The fact that we can talk about God, the fact that I can talk to the students and whenever I’m talking to them or we’re reprimanding them, I always ask them, “If Jesus was here, would you act that way?” God is the center of our lives and I know that when people come into this school, it permeates.

There’s a feeling of love. There’s a feeling of faith and I like that. I really appreciate that. Marta’s description of how faith permeates the school culture was not unique to her school, but was a quality noted by many of the study’s participants, including Anna:

My faith and the faith of the staff I think impacts everything that we do and all the decisions that we make. Obviously, we’re here to teach the students, but at the end of the



day, we're [also] here to support them and help them build their faith and to go on to be good human beings.

Philomena also discussed faith as being at the center of everything she does as principal:

One of the things that I love is the culture of our school...faith is at the center of everything we do. That many times it is...I don't want to say it's taken for granted, but when you don't know anything else, you just feel like your faith life is your life. But when that's just something that's just like a norm at your school or a norm in your life...then it's just something that's so natural. So, for me, seeing God at the center of our life is important. It's really looking at what we do as service to other people. Not just seeing it as a job but seeing it as like...how can we serve people better?

For some of the participants, the Catholic faith and the importance of serving the Church had been instilled in them from a young age, thus contributing to their decision to work in the capacity that they do. For example, Rose described her upbringing and being very involved with the Catholic church:

My dad was involved with the church and was an usher. We attended catechism with the nuns so they were a great influence on us. We were also a part of catechism and served as CCD (Confraternity of Christian Doctrine)<sup>18</sup> teachers. My mom was also an educator, but I think it's more the faith and being in the church and involved in the church that really brought me more into Catholic education; it's a calling.

Anna also discussed being baptized and raised Catholic, although she never had the opportunity to attend a Catholic school due to her family's economic situation: "Being here now, I couldn't see myself being anywhere else. There is such a difference in the experience of the kids here. They tend to grow up a little bit slower than kids in the local public school."

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<sup>18</sup> A religious education program of the Roman Catholic Church, typically designed for children.

## **Finding #4 (RQ1): Receiving Diverse Support Is a Factor Contributing to Principal Retention**

All of the study's principals reported receiving support from a variety of different entities and people. The major sources of the support they receive were their communities, including their faculty and staff, external organizations and donors, family, key mentorship from individuals within the DCS, and their principal colleagues. I will examine each of these forms of support subsequently.

**Support from the school community.** Many of the participants described receiving ongoing support from members of their school communities, including their own team. Most of the support described was in the form of individuals taking on additional tasks and responsibilities that would normally fall on the principal. For example, more than half of the participants discussed supportive parents who mobilized into effective volunteers. Quiteria described working with key parents to start a marketing and enrollment team; "I was like, 'Parents, we need 35 more students next year, talk to everybody, here [are] things to say' ... and that kind of got the ball rolling ...and enrollment is up this year." Similarly, Clare also described establishing a marketing group called *Madrinas*<sup>19</sup>, whose sole task was to recruit new families:

They would go out into the community. We realized our families only respond[ed] to the one to one. They don't respond to a fancy flyer or a website or things like that. We got this group of parents together, they went out and they were passing out flyers and bringing in families.

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<sup>19</sup> The *Madrinas* Model is an outreach program to recruit and retain Latino families in Catholic schools. The model is designed to increase Latino enrollment by creating and strengthening the connection between Latino families and the school (Alliance for Catholic Education, n.d.).

Jeanne also described the support she receives from her active parent board, which helps both market the school and also provide school tours to potential new families. She stated, “They’re really good in regards to talking to parents and convincing them.”

Many participants not only described receiving support from active parent volunteers, but also explained how they effectively delegate additional responsibilities and tasks to team members in their school sites, thus slightly alleviating their own workload. For example, Rita described one of her teachers who provides ongoing support in the areas of curriculum and instruction:

If there is something we need or something we would like to implement in terms of curriculum we will first discuss it ourselves, come up with ways we could do it...

Actually, she works directly with whatever the change is going to be.

She went on to discuss another one of her teachers who takes on added responsibilities with regard to technology:

If it’s in the area of technology and we know we would like everyone to be on board with [it], then Mr. Travis<sup>20</sup>...he’s a teacher but he’s also designated to be my tech coordinator.

So, he’s basically right there in terms of [giving] his input.

Marta attributed her school running smoothly, even when she’s off campus, to designated teacher-leaders on campus:

My group, my core four here...I’ll tell you this, when I’m out, the school runs as if I was here. Nobody knows when I’m here or when I’m not here. They only know when I do my walkthroughs because everything flows just as smooth when I’m not here. It’s not like the house is going to fall down.

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<sup>20</sup> Individual’s name has been changed to protect confidentiality.

Anna also described effectively delegating tasks and responsibilities to teacher leaders in her school site:

I delegate a lot to my staff. I have the three VPs, and then I also have teacher leaders, too. So, almost every one of my teachers has some sort of admin-type role. And so definitely, they feel that their job holds importance and they're not just here to teach the students...they're [here] to uphold the school and what we're doing academically and socially.

Anna also explained that she does not conduct the interview process alone when trying to fill an open position, but rather brings in other faculty and staff members to help her make the best decision possible. All of the participants delegate tasks in some way at their school sites, thus slightly alleviating their own workload.

In addition to taking on added responsibilities from both parents and team members alike, the study's participants also spoke of ongoing emotional support they receive in the form of encouragement and verbal affirmations. For example, Philomena explained that parents frequently drop by her office to ask her how she is doing:

I have parents that come in that just want to talk or check on me or see how I'm doing. That's really nice, too... That feeling of other people praying for you [and] thinking of you. So I think with the community there's a strong sense for me of being accepted and respected.

Clare spoke of many instances where she has been reminded of the support she has, especially on her most challenging days, "They help remind me, 'It's not just you. We're in this together...whatever it is.'" Although the majority of the participants did describe having positive, supportive relationships from parents, it is important to note that most of them also

associated parents with some of their most taxing experiences on the job. In these cases, they looked to members of their faculty and staff for support. For example, Edith described her teacher leaders as being great sources of support, especially when she's problem-solving: "I think what's helped between the faculty and [myself] is [that] I have a leadership team that has two teachers who are my sounding board." In a job in which one can find oneself operating on an island, having key individuals on the team in whom they can confide and with whom they can problem-solve creates necessary feelings of support and collaboration.

The majority of the study's participants described their teams as if they were family. As Jeanne stated, "With the faculty, I mean...I treat them like my family. We're close in the sense of, they always know I'm one to have family come first." Some of the participants even discussed instances in which they were extremely vulnerable with members of their staff and were met with an immense amount of support and reassurance. For example, both Clare and Anna described having a difficult day during which they were disrespected by parents and brought to tears, after which they were then comforted by their office managers. Clare went on to discuss how the majority of the support that she receives comes from within her team:

Now, after [so many] years I think the support that I need comes from within. It comes from the teachers and staff knowing that our school isn't going to fall apart if I'm not here. Even if I did leave or ... decided it was time for me to go, the teachers and staff who are here are going to uphold the culture that we've established. I do feel strongly about that. Like I said, I try to support them, but they support me in so many ways.

Catherine also described her staff as family, but mentioned that it can sometimes be problematic in the level of comfort it can create:

I love them. We're a family, which is good and bad, too, because it's...I would say...the radical candor part, [but] they know that I love them to death and we have always formed a good relationship with them. I always want a collaborative culture.

Although the majority of participants described their faculty and staff as extremely collaborative, supportive, and similar to family, it is also important to note that some of these same participants explained that their school community has not always been this way. Many participants described being intentional about building community within the team and fostering relationships that then led to feelings of trust and respect, but that this came only after years of challenges, and sometimes even changes in personnel. For example, Rose stated, "with the group that I have...It's a good group now. I went through a lot of difficulties at the beginning and I had to let go of three teachers and it was a chaos." The support participants receive from individuals within the community is integral in their retention. As Clare stated:

If you didn't have things like that support in place, people who really do have your back, no one could survive the kind of challenges that a Catholic school principal has. The reason why I have stayed is that it's helped me to get through any challenge that has presented itself.

**Support from external organizations and donors.** All of the study's participants receive support of some kind from external organizations and donors, typically in the form of professional development and/or funding. With the vast majority of Catholic schools operating at a significant deficit, receiving financial support is integral to maintaining the operating budget and alleviating a principal's workload. The more financial support a principal has from the outside, the less stress he or she faces on a daily basis in trying to make payroll. The financial support received comes from a number of places and people, including foundations, individual

donors, or a development board. When Marta initially took over her school, for example, she feared she would not make it past the first few payrolls:

So what I did was my first year I tried to tackle the going under issue. I realized I couldn't do it by myself. So I opened up to our foundations that were really close to our school...[and] I had to start creating relationships with them.

Anna also discussed the importance of foundation support in her school site, stating, "With finances, we get a lot of support from foundations, so we're very grateful for that. If we didn't have that financial support, there's no way we'd be where we are." Edith also stated that without the support of a key organization, her school would cease to exist; "If not the school will shut. The school wouldn't be functioning without [them]." Several of the participants also have a development board that is composed of well-networked and well-established individuals who solicit donations on the school's behalf, typically from within their own network. Clare described her school's development board being key to maintaining operations, especially in the most challenging times:

I think our board, any kind of major needs that the day to day struggles of the school need, they have and are willing to fulfill. For example, one year we were going to combine grades three and four, just because financially speaking...it was a really tight year. I had expressed to the board...that we were trying to be cautious and not over hire. One of the board members, after the meeting he talks to me, he says, "How much are you looking at? What is really the difference?" I'm like, "At least \$20,000." He said, "I'll write you a check. Hire that person." That's the kind of thing that, for me, shows that trust aspect, that he's just like, "Yeah, I trust what you're doing." But they're those kinds

of people. If I didn't have that support I would feel the burden of carrying all of this by myself, and I really don't feel that way.

Although all of the participants receive financial support of some kind from an external organization, foundation, or donor, a few of them also reported receiving additional forms of support in the areas of curriculum and professional development, which has been significant in helping them meet their academic goals. Rose described receiving support from one particular foundation; “[They] have been a major help. I think we're only like 12 schools, but they educate us and everything...and they give us professional development with data and [supplying the] curriculum.” Although overall the conversations surrounding assistance from external entities were positive, Catherine did express frustration with some organizations or foundations wanting to fund very specific programs or projects:

I think they go hand in hand because I'm able to find donors, which has been very helpful, but the problem is they have specific[atons], they want to fund the music program, they want to fund the new textbooks. But I don't want that. I need to make sure that I make payroll next month. I need to make sure that the insurance bill is paid. I need to make sure the lights are still on.

**Support from family.** Many of the participants discussed the reality of working long hours, carrying great responsibility, and receiving support from their family unit. In fact, it was apparent that all of the participants have a family that supports the work they do, shares in their same faith convictions, and even goes above and beyond to help them with their job responsibilities. For example, Rita stated, “My husband...he's my handyman. If something happens in there that needs fixing, I just call him and he'll fix it. Or, he knows a maintenance person who he can call to come and fix it for us.” Two other participants also specifically



discussed their husbands and the ongoing support they receive from them. For example, Clare shared how her husband helps strengthen her faith and feeds her the support she needs to continue to do her job. Similarly, Anna said, “When I’m home, he is my support.” Many of the participants discussed the importance of having family that not only supports what they do, but also believes in the day to day mission of a Catholic school principal. This support manifests itself in different ways with each participant, but unanimously it meant someone to talk to on the most challenging days: someone who does not just listen, but encourages. For example, Quiteria stated, “My parents are like so proud that I work at a Catholic school,” and even on her most challenging days her parents tell her, “Oh, come on, you can do another month. You can get through the year.” Jeanne also expressed being able to go home and vent to her family, stating, “I just go home and they hear me out and my dad and my mom will give me some advice.”

**Support or mentorship from individuals within DCS.** Almost all of the participants reported receiving some level of support from the DCS, although the type of support varied from participant to participant. Whereas some described feeling supported with great mentorship from someone working within the DCS, others expressed gratitude for professional development and/or the human resources and legal services available.

All principals within the ADLA are assigned to an Assistant Superintendent who is typically responsible for supporting anywhere from 15-30 school principals and their sites. Many of the study’s participants spoke highly of the support they received from their Assistant Superintendents. For example, Clare spoke highly of the Assistant Superintendent she had in her first year as principal:

In the beginning when I first became a principal my assistant superintendent at that time was amazing. He was the kind of person who I needed that year because it was a hard

year financially speaking and with WASC<sup>21</sup>. He really was present the way that I needed him to be.

Rose also felt that the support she received from her Assistant Superintendent in her first year was especially pivotal in her retention and success as a principal:

My first year she helped me the whole year. Even though she was my Assistant Superintendent, it was more of a one-on-one. She would come once a week and we would sit and we would do everything, including the budget, including cash flow...all of that. So that's what helped my first year of being principal. I wasn't lost because of that. I think it has to do a lot with my former assistant superintendent. Because I was ready to leave like they say, throw in the towel, and she's like, no, give it another year.

Quiteria also felt her Assistant Superintendent has kept her from walking off the job several times over the years. She described one time in particular when she said she told her Assistant Superintendent, "I am at my wits' end with everything," and the Assistant Superintendent responded in a very supportive manner and sought resources to help her with the particular issue she was facing. Other participants discussed a less hands-on approach from their Assistant Superintendents, but nonetheless feel supported by them. For example, Philomena did not describe experiences where her Assistant Superintendents have sat down and combed through budgets with her, but they have always been there when she has called with a concern: "I've always felt that they've responded when I've needed something. Just their attitude and their own personalities has really helped. Like I feel like they're people that you can reach at any time for support or guidance." Clare also reported receiving this same type of support from the Archdiocese and the DCS:

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<sup>21</sup> WASC (Western Association of Schools and Colleges) is an organization that provides accreditation of public and private universities, colleges, secondary and elementary schools.

...that's kind of how the Archdiocese is, too. If need them, if I need somebody to call, if it's legal or HR or anybody like that, a parent concern and I have to let my [Assistant] Superintendent [know to] give them a heads up, they're there. They're there. I guess that's comforting knowing that if I do have a concern or need help I can reach out to them at any time and someone will be able to help.

Although 10 of the 11 participants felt they received support of some kind from the Archdiocese, a few of them did note that they have to actively seek the support in order to receive it. As Anna stated, "They definitely had been a big support for me, but usually when I reach out for it." Marta also acknowledged that if she needs the support, she knows where to get it, although it does not always come right away:

If there's issues I call them. Not always do they respond right away because I know there's other issues that are bigger than probably mine, but I can leave him a message and I know even if it's 8 or 9 at night, we can still talk over the phone and talk about the issues that happened.

Two of the participants described feeling supported by their relationships with the Deputy Superintendent and Superintendent of Schools. These relationships were formed when the participants were students in graduate courses taught by those leaders at Loyola Marymount University. For example, Edith stated,

It was a blessing that I was going to LMU when I became a principal, and that I had them as professors. I think I was blessed in that sense of just having the right people that I could reach out to.

Similarly, Catherine stated:

I was part [of a] program at LMU and [they] were helping me and encouraged me. They helped me throughout the process, especially that first half year. And I feel like that program in and of itself helped me especially since I just was learning hands on. At the time, because I was part of the program, I got a lot of support from them.

Several of the participants expressed their gratitude for the support they received from DCS in the form of professional development. For example, Clare said:

The training that the Archdiocese did...to be able to provide staff development for principals and leaders ensuring that effective instructional strategies are being implemented in the classroom. For me, although it's been a bit of a rollercoaster, high and lows, for the most part I feel that as a school it's helped us become more cohesive in terms of...how we're teaching, so I'm very appreciative of that aspect.

Rita also was pleased with both the professional development she has received in addition to some of the systems implemented by the DCS have helped develop her leadership:

I must admit to them I do like the systems that they are coming up with right now to help me. For example, when we went into the Cultures of Learning<sup>22</sup>, and our systems or the way we hold meetings, and all these particular things, making sure everyone participates with the norms. All of this really made a difference in my staff because it really did bring about more collaboration. I just think the road that they're leading to now is very helpful in terms of me from where I'm coming from the old tradition [to] this part of learning. It enlightens me and it enables me to broaden my horizon so that I could get a little bit more out of my community.

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<sup>22</sup> Rita is referring to a series of specific professional development workshops led by the Archdiocese on how to create a culture of learning in schools. A culture of learning is a collection of organizational values and practices that promote continuous growth and learning.

All of the participants reported receiving support from the DCS, although the type of support varied from participant to participant. Nonetheless, it plays a pivotal role in their retention. As Rose stated, “I think if we didn’t have any kind of support from DCS, I think then it would be also another factor for me to leave.”

**Support from colleagues.** Many of the participants described support networks within their principal colleagues. Not all of these networks were the same, however, but eight of the 11 participants discussed having other principals on whom they could count when facing a crisis or to use as a sounding board. Almost all of the participants discussed having a very collaborative and supportive deanery<sup>23</sup>. Additionally, many of the participants reported forging friendships from graduate programs or alternative leadership roles and ventures both inside and outside of DCS. Rose stated that because her deanery was composed of schools with the same socioeconomic challenges, it was helpful in problem-solving collaboratively; “We’re all in the same boat when it comes to finance. We tend to help each other with giving ideas of how to manage our financial stability.” Jeanne also attributed feeling supported to the relationships within her deanery:

So...when in doubt call your fellow principals in your deanery. All I do is call others to say, “Hey, you know what, I’m dealing with this right now. How did you do about it? Have you ever dealt with it? If you have, what have you done?” And so, we share ideas. We share our thoughts, even written letters that they’ve already done, you know, especially when it has to do with policies and legal aspects.

Although Quiteria described her deanery as being supportive and highly collaborative overall, the friendships she has forged with a few principals in the deanery in particular have been a key source of support:

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<sup>23</sup> A deanery is a group of schools clustered by geographic region; deanery meetings occur once a month.

All the principals like each other for the most part. What's been most helpful, though, is there's like a group of five principals in the area that just chitchat, and we have a group text. And if you're having a problem, we ask each other like, "How do we do this again?" or, "Do you remember how to do that? What would you do if a kid did blank?" We call ourselves the pals, and my little pal support group has been really critical. It's like a principal PLC kind of.

Florian also feels his deanery is extremely supportive in a way that DCS is not:

Nobody competes with each other and I think people honestly try to help. The meetings are helpful, too. I think input is sincere and honest and forthright. I don't think we get that anywhere else. I don't think we get it when we go to the [DCS] principals' meeting. I don't think there's that candor of expression. It's more bureaucratic.

Catherine noted that though she now feels extremely supported by her deanery, it was not always a climate conducive to collaboration:

Our deanery has gotten to a point where we've gotten pretty close to certain people and they've been very helpful. I love how I've seen the change [over many] years with the deanery, because we were not collaborative at all. We were so competitive and there's still some competition here and there obviously, but people actually call when they're going to take your kid or if they're getting another teacher inquiry or something. They call and we have lunch together and they've been very helpful.

In addition to support from their deaneries, almost all of the participants discussed having an additional collegial network of support<sup>24</sup>. The networks varied greatly, but typically entailed

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<sup>24</sup> Many of the participants discussed specific networks that were composed of very few principals. Even using pseudonyms for the sake of including data to describe these networks would potentially reveal participants' identities. No data was included to describe these networks or relationships for this reason.

forging relationships with principals who were involved in the same university partnership programs, alternative leadership programs, or instructional support programs from foundations.

**Finding #5 (RQ1): There Is a Relationship Between Principals’ Satisfaction in Their Current Positions and Their Retention**

All of the participants were asked to rate themselves on a scale of 1-10 in regard to their level of satisfaction with their job, 10 being *extremely satisfied* and 1 being *extremely dissatisfied*. Table 5 presents participants’ responses in addition to the number of years they have served as principal of their current school site.

Table 5

*Participants and Satisfaction Rating*

Interview Participant	Years in Current Site	Satisfaction Rating
Clare	12	10
Anna	13	9
Quiteria	6	7.5
Rose	7	7
Jeanne	8	8
Edith	6	10
Catherine	7	8
Florian	9	9
Rita	30	8
Philomena	8	9
Marta	9	10

The data demonstrate a clear relationship between high levels of satisfaction and a willingness to stay on the job, even when it is challenging. As Rita stated, “I love the job. I love what I do. I love the community. I feel that I make a difference. And why do I stay here? I just love it.” Several of the participants described the job of a Catholic school principal as extremely rewarding. For example, Anna said, “That relationship that I have with the families and the kids is very, very rewarding.” Although all of the participants could easily articulate the job’s challenges, they were more eager to share their love of the work and described themselves as

“making a difference.” Their satisfaction with the job itself and feeling the impact of their work thus contributes to their longevity in the position.

### **Research Question 2: Findings**

#### **Finding #1 (RQ2): Principals Recommend More Personalized, Ongoing Support From the Department of Catholic Schools to Increase Retention**

It is important to recognize that although many of the principals reported having supportive relationships with various individuals within the DCS, such as Assistant Superintendents, they simultaneously articulated the need for more individualized systems of support that are tailored to meet the needs of each individual site. Whereas some of the participants felt the existing supports had served them well, the majority of participants felt that the current top-down, one size fits all model is ineffective.

**Personalized support.** Half of the participants expressed the importance of having the DCS provide more personalized support to schools. The participants explained that the current approach is similar to a “one size fits all model,” when the school sites vary too drastically for this method to be effective. As Rose stated, “When you go to a principal meeting...everyone is doing things differently and things work for some schools and others don’t.” Similarly, Quiteria recognized that DCS tries to be supportive, but ultimately needs to identify the individual needs of the schools more effectively; “I think they want to be supportive, but the problem is they don’t ask how they can support, they just think that they’re anticipating needs, and they shove a lot of things that no one has asked for.” Many of the participants believe that identifying the needs of the school from those serving within the school sites themselves will make all the difference in rolling out support. Florian also feels there is a large disconnect between DCS and the school sites:



I think they're really disconnected from the needs...because they do a lot of blanket things and...there's no differentiation. I think they need to tier the type of support they give: What type of school are you? What kind of income school are you? What's your enrollment level at? There's got to be parameters that are similar. But when it comes top down...I think they need to do a better needs assessment to see what's really, really, really necessary...and they don't do that.

Marta agreed that DCS should be more involved at the individual school level and “check in on principals” more than they are doing currently. Jeanne also believed it would be helpful to have DCS representatives visit the school sites throughout the year:

Sitting down with us, you know, pretty much asking where is it that you need the most help and following through with it. Just simply visiting and not just the assistant superintendent, but I think even superintendents should be going around every now and then.

Although almost all of the participants appreciate the autonomy they have at their individual site, they nonetheless desire occasional feedback and more personalized systems of support. Two of the participants described ideas for a potential new model that could provide this type of individualized support while simultaneously acknowledging that there might be financial restraints in implementing them. For example, Clare said:

For me, I think the personal level of support is really important. Our Assistant Superintendent...have so many schools. There's no way they can really be available to all the principals the way that I feel would be the most beneficial. I don't know the reality of it, the practicality of it financially speaking. I feel like they need more Assistant Superintendents, if that's what you want to call it...because I already know the

Superintendents, the Assistant Superintendents have a lot to do, but maybe having someone in between them...who could be a little bit more available and ready to help principals where they are.

Similarly, Quiteria felt there needs to be increased presence in the form of “satellite” or regional offices wherein Assistant Superintendents could have on-site office hours. She stated:

How easy would it be to have an Assistant Superintendent at that regional office one day a week, all day long? And if you needed something, you could go to them, and they would help you like physically face to face...they’d be there, and if you needed to see them or if they had a block some time to go visit a school, they’re already [be] in that vicinity.

**Ongoing opportunities for support.** Four of the participants discussed wanting additional opportunities for ongoing support. As Clare stated, “Now, I don’t know if it’s because I’m not a first-year principal or it’s been so many years, there isn’t as much presence from the Archdiocese on that level to provide support.” Much like Clare, other participants also reported a drop-off in support after the first year of principalship and a desire to have more ongoing, consistent support from the Archdiocese. Marta explained that she would like more ongoing opportunities for professional growth whereas Catherine expressed a desire for more opportunities to connect with principals outside of her deanery. Similarly, Edith feels principals should be nurtured and “taken care of” by DCS the way principals are expected to care for their teachers:

It’s taking care of just like we say, we want to take care of the whole child. Like we try our best to take care of the teachers, and do little things...You don’t wait till the end of

the year, “Oh, let’s give you a Hawaii trip<sup>25</sup>.” No, I needed you back in October...like they need to take care of us. And I think that’s what’s missing.

### **Finding #2 (RQ2): Principals Recommend Increased Training and Transparency for Both Prospective and New Principals**

The majority of the study’s participants discussed the need for increased training for incoming principals. The participants discussed several types of training, including a mentorship network and an on-the-job or residency training program, in addition to providing more oversight when it comes to school’s budgets. Similarly, some of the participants also expressed the need for training pastors and for increased transparency from DCS regarding a school’s financial state prior to a new principal coming on.

Many of the study’s participants discussed the importance of more formal training for incoming principals. A few of the participants commented on how they had little to no training when they came on the job and how much of a difference it would have made. A few of the principals specifically discussed the need for more on-the-job training prior to officially stepping onto the job. For example, Philomena stated, “Before somebody even becomes a principal, [give] them an opportunity to train...[give] them the support of another person.” Philomena went on to discuss how critical it is to have the support of someone else when you are first starting out and that mentorship should be integrated both before someone takes on the job, especially in their first couple of years; “Like, they can’t do this role by themselves. So being able to say like there has to be somebody else there that can support them.”

Similarly, Rose also felt on-the-job training in the form of an internship is critical to a principal’s success and retention. She feels the internship should expand over several years and the “intern” should be paired with a seasoned principal: “I think maybe like a 2-year or 3-year

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<sup>25</sup> Edith was referring to a Hawaii trip raffle that occurs at an all-principals’ meeting at the end of the academic year.

internship where you're actually involved with everything...with a principal that's experienced...because when you come into the administration part of the job, you're clueless with a lot of things." Anna also discussed the need for a mentor principal and an opportunity to shadow said mentor prior to taking on the principal job. She also emphasized the importance of the mentor principal not being one's Assistant Superintendent, because there should not be a power dynamic in the relationship:

Cause assistant sups. aren't principals anymore. They were obviously. But someone [is] in it with you at the same time that you're in it, that you can, as a new principal, say, "Hey, you're working on your budget. I am too right now. Can you help me with this?" Someone who's in your shoes at the same time. I think to have that would be a great support.

Several of the study's participants commented on the need for more training specifically in the area of finance. As Anna stated, "I think there definitely needs to be more training for [the] budget and how to maintain the budget. I think that that definitely would be a big help for principals." Marta also discussed the need for additional finance training, stating that not all incoming principals are "financially savvy" individuals. She said, "They [need to] understand how to run a school [and] finances in the area of business. They've got to go through some sort of a principal finance 101." The need for additional finance training also comes from the reality that many of the Catholic schools face overwhelming deficits and cumbersome budgets. Many of the participants discussed having no idea of the reality of the budget of the school they were taking over, and thus being completely unprepared to work with it. As a result of this reality, many of the participants recognized a need for increased transparency from the DCS regarding a school's economic situation.

A few of the principals noted the need for increased transparency with regard to schools' budgets and financial realities. For example, Jeanne explained that it is critical for new principals to have a deep understanding of the finances of the school they are taking over. She emphasized the importance of principals "making sure that they know what they're getting themselves into. Don't paint a beautiful picture because it isn't that beautiful... Then letting them know the difficulties of each and every individual school." She also expressed the need for transparency, especially when it comes to inner-city schools, stating, "Schools that are already struggling, they need to know that off the bat."

Participants also expressed frustration with the lack of oversight from the DCS with regard to individual school budgets; the frustration came from participants in particularly dire financial situations. Edith expressed her disappointment in principals continuing to be hired in schools that should be closed due to their ongoing severe financial distress and the lack of DCS support for those individuals:

If you know a school is not able to survive, then why are you going to put somebody there? I know it's hard to close them, but if you have to do it then, you know, but don't put a principal and have her like... wrecking her brain out... and then that's it.

Florian also expressed similar disappointment in the ADLA and the DCS. From a business standpoint, he believes that many Los Angeles Catholic schools are failing. He stated:

From regular metrics, some of our businesses are literally failing. Their enrollments are low, they have no money in the bank, they can't make budget, and their scores are deplorable. And we're still supporting them. It makes no sense. And in some cases, it might be that the leadership needs to be changed immediately.

Florian went on to express his frustration with DCS and the ADLA continuing to minimally support these schools financially, while simultaneously having little involvement in the day to day operations or leadership of the schools themselves. Several of the study's participants feel that DCS should have increased oversight specifically in economically challenging school sites with the purpose of supporting the principals and taking more ownership of the books. For example, Marta stated:

When a school is in shambles I think it's a good idea for an entity that knows how to run a business to take over. I feel that DCS should really see very closely at those schools that are not financially stable. And I think that they [should] truly, truly analyze the financial status of every school. And when I say truly analyze it's like get your ass in there and take a look, open those books.

**Pastor training.** Several of the participants discussed the need for pastor training. Because the pastor is the Head of School, they believed that he should be aware of the school's financial realities and held accountable for supporting the principal. Edith stated, "We need to educate more our pastors that have schools., I don't know why they have them overseeing principals." Other participants felt similarly that if the pastor is overseeing the principal, it is imperative that he have a grasp of the day to day operations of the school and fully support the principal in executing those operations. Catherine agreed with Edith, stating, "He needs to help. And not just financially, but also coming in and having talks with the kids and forming relationships."

### **Conclusion**

This chapter analyzed and synthesized the data collected from in-depth interviews with 11 participants. The first set of findings address the key factors contributing to the participants'

retention in in low-income, Catholic elementary schools in Los Angeles. Among these findings are the significance of having a trusting and supportive relationship with one's supervisor, a strong connection to the school community, identifying one's job as a vocation with a solid faith foundation, and diverse systems of support. Lastly, a correlation was found between retention and satisfaction.

The second set of findings address research question two by listing specific recommendations participants have for better supporting principal retention. Among these recommendations were more personalized and ongoing support from the DCS. Additionally, participants recommended increased training and transparency for new and prospective principals. In Chapter Five, I discuss these findings and connect them to the literature presented in Chapter Two. Additionally, Chapter Five also includes recommendations for principal retention, an overview of the study's limitations, recommendations for future research, and the significance of the findings.

## CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to examine the key factors contributing to principal retention in Catholic elementary schools in the ADLA. Through in-depth, semi-structured interviews, I was able to gather data that led to not only an understanding of why principals stay, but also a set of recommendations regarding how to better support Catholic school principals and ultimately increase their retention. This study adds to the body of knowledge on this subject by focusing more on retention rather than turnover and using satisfied sitting principals to understand how the ADLA can better select and support principals on the job. Most importantly, this study focused on Catholic school principals where the overarching body of research is limited.

In this chapter, I summarize the study's key findings and explain both their relationship and significance to the greater body of research on principal turnover and retention. After summarizing the key findings, I identify a specific set of recommendations for future principal retention, share a few unanticipated lessons learned, and identify the study's limitations. Lastly, I outline the study's connection to the theoretical framework and make recommendations for policy, practice, and future research.

### **Discussion of Key Findings**

There is very little existing research on Catholic school principal retention. As such, this study contributes a great deal to the body of knowledge by more closely understanding the experiences of Catholic school principals, specifically serving in low-income communities, and what drives them to stay on the job. Research confirms that turnover is seen most in marginalized and under resourced communities (Belt, 2009; Branch et al., 2013; Chaplin Partlow & Ridenour, 2008; Gates et al., 2006). As discussed in Chapter Two, much of the turnover



experienced in these communities can be attributed to the many challenges these communities, in particular, face on an ongoing basis, including but not limited to poor academic achievement, violence, low or lack of parent involvement, language barriers, and lack of funding and resources (Cooley & Shen, 2000).

Contrary to popular belief, the majority of U.S. Catholic schools are in low-income, vulnerable communities, in service of the mission of the Catholic Church (NCEA, n.d.a). For this reason, it was important for me to speak to principals serving in these communities and examine what contributes to their longevity in the position despite the myriad overwhelming challenges. The findings in this study indicate that there are commonalities in why principals stay on the job. As such, we can use these findings as a framework for developing systematic supports for principals that has the potential to influence future principal retention. The three key findings of the study are discussed subsequently.

### **Live and Let...Run a School: Trusting Relationships between Principal and Pastor**

This study found that an integral aspect of a principal's longevity lies in the trusting relationship he/she has with his/her direct supervisor, oftentimes a pastor. The fact that the school principals report to a pastor is a governance challenge unique to Catholic schools in that the parish priests are the ultimate authority over the school. Oftentimes this relationship between pastor and principal can become conflicting and result in principal turnover (Durow & Brock, 2004; Fraser & Brock, 2006). For example, if a pastor does not trust the principal to make day to day operational decisions or overrides a decision already made by the principal, then the relationship could become contentious. An ineffective, tense relationship between the school principal and pastor can ultimately result in a lack of sustainability for the school. According to Schafer (2004), conflicts between pastors and principals are not uncommon and can create stress

for the pastor, principal, and school community as a whole. Additionally, they have the potential to influence the pastor and principal's working relationship, which could then affect the faculty, staff, and greater parish community. Therefore, this study's findings support the existing literature in confirming that a trusting, cooperative relationship between principal and pastor is essential in both principal retention and success of the school (Ozar & Weitzel-O'Neill, 2012; Schafer, 2004).

Initially in uncovering this finding, I identified it as a positive relationship between the pastor and principal. Upon further analysis, however, I realized that the relationships varied by participant and what defined a "positive relationship" was ultimately subjective. That being said, there did exist a clear commonality among all principals and their supervisors: namely, the importance of the ability to collaborate as needed, seek support when needed, and ultimately be trusted to do their jobs free of micromanagement.

The pastor serves as the head decision maker of the parish school and is also responsible for hiring and re-hiring the school's principal (Ciriello, 1996). It is important to note that although the ADLA works toward creating cohesion and system-wide expectations across their over 200 elementary schools, ultimately each school operates as an independent entity under the sole authority of the pastor. It is both this unique governance model and a pastor's comfort level in relinquishing day to day operational decisions to the principal that create a sense of autonomy among participants. Although the participants were not all "friends" with their pastors, per se, they did all feel respected by them and trusted to do the work day in and day out, free of unnecessary oversight. This autonomy is integral in Catholic school principal retention.

**Recommendations for supervisors.** Because the relationship between pastor and principal is key in increasing principal retention, it is necessary that pastors, specifically, receive

adequate training in how to best support principals. In many cases, pastors have little to no background in education and yet carry all of the power and decision-making regarding school operations. Although this organizational structure is in adherence to canon law<sup>26</sup>, which grants pastors full authority over the school site, pastors can nonetheless benefit from an opportunity to receive training in how to best support their principals and the importance of respecting the principal as an educational expert and allow them autonomy to do what is in the students' best educational interest.

After reflecting on the data, it appears as though the ideal governance structure is one where the pastor provides guidance and acts as a sounding board when needed, but provides autonomy to the site principal to operate the school on a daily basis. Ideally, the pastor would also be involved in the school, specifically in developing relationships with the students, but only if that involvement did not include the presence of micromanagement.

### **Support Along the Way**

Study participants described various systems of support that contributed to their retention. More specifically, participants described ongoing opportunities for support from fellow principals, particularly on their most challenging days, as being critical to their success. This finding supports the existing research in that a mentoring network of principals along with continuous support is crucial in the sustaining of quality principals (Zellner et al., 2002). Much like the research states, study participants discussed integral relationships with individuals acting as mentors that provided them with ongoing support throughout their principal tenure. Similarly, research shows that school principals, and specifically Catholic school principals with little to no

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<sup>26</sup> Canon law is commonly referred to as church law, which provides a common frame of references for all Catholic schools because such church law is binding in all church institutions. The Code of Canon Law consists of a set of rules and regulations that primarily establish a framework for the hierarchical governance of the Catholic Church (Schafer, 2004).

on-the-ground support staff, grow frustrated due to feelings of isolation and loneliness (Drago-Severson, 2012; Durow & Brock, 2004), thus further affirming the need for professional learning communities and opportunities for collaboration between principals. Although not all participants pointed to the same network of principals, most agreed that they derive a majority of this collegiate support from their deaneries<sup>27</sup>. Participants agreed that having positive collegial relationships in their deaneries provided them with ongoing opportunities for collaboration, problem solving, and support. This is not the case with all Catholic school principals, however, because several participants described principals they know who do not have this kind of collaborative culture in their deaneries. What makes the study's participants unique is that all of them identified their deaneries as a significant source of support.

Many of the participants also have a mentor within the DCS. The mentors ranged from Assistant Superintendents to the Deputy Superintendent, but none of these mentorships were formally established by the DCS. The principals who reported having this type of relationship explained that it was a pre-existing relationship and/or friendship prior to their becoming a school principal. Therefore, the specific support varied, but it required having someone key within the DCS who they could seek out when in crisis. The findings support the research in that principals need support in order to manage the various challenges of their role and avoid burn out (Drago-Severson, 2012).

**Recommendations regarding support.** All of the participants described a network of principals on whom they could rely for support in challenging times, most of whom pointed to their deaneries. However, a few who did not rely on their deaneries reported having a deanery that is competitive instead of collaborative and does not value deanery meeting attendance. With this being said, it is important for the DCS to prioritize creating collaborative cultures in all

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<sup>27</sup> A deanery is a group of schools clustered by geographic region; deanery meetings occur once a month.

deaneries. This responsibility typically falls on the deanery chair, who is also a principal in the deanery, but this is not always the most productive or effective strategy. Most principals are already committing a great deal of time to improving their own school cultures, so it would be helpful for Assistant Superintendents, for example, to assess the current culture of the deanery and work intentionally with the deanery toward a more collaborative, supportive climate. The deanery PLCs (professional learning communities)<sup>28</sup> being built in the overall school system already provides a great opportunity to strengthen the existing infrastructure so as to benefit all principals and not just those who happen to be in a collaborative deanery.

Most of the study's participants also spoke of having a key insider within the DCS who informally acts as their mentor. This relationship is particularly helpful when principals are solving problems or facing a crisis. This type of relationship would benefit all principals. Thus, a recommendation for the DCS is to implement a mentorship program wherein new principals, in particular, are strategically paired with a veteran principal to act as their mentor. Additionally, there should be an opportunity at the beginning of this mentorship to foster the relationship between the two, such as the first-year principal retreat, and a clear list of expectations for the mentor principal. A stipend could be used to further incentivize veteran principals' participation as mentors.

### **Running on Faith**

All of the study's participants described a strong, steadfast connection to their faith that contributes to their retention. This confirms research findings by Fraser and Brock (2006), who claimed that many Catholic school principals stay on the job due to their commitment to Catholic education and the mission of the church as a whole. All of the study's participants believe in the

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<sup>28</sup> Professional learning communities are a method to foster collaborative learning among colleagues within a specific field, such as education.

importance of being able to talk about God in school. Edith even said that she could not imagine being a teacher or principal without being able to talk to kids about God. For the study's participants, it was clear that faith needs to be an overt part of everything they do, most especially their jobs. As indicated in the research, all of the participants explained that their job is a vocation, or a spiritual calling by God to serve in the school's community, and not simply a job. Therefore, all of the participants indicated that their faith is at the center of their retention.

**Recommendations surrounding faith.** Although all of the study's participants demonstrated evidence of all of the findings at varying degrees, the most important was their faith foundation. If faith is a central part of retention, then it should be fostered throughout the year and in a more intentional manner. Principals need their faith to be nourished and replenished on an ongoing basis and cannot always depend on the pastor to facilitate this. Principals are the spiritual leaders on the school's campus (Ciriello, 1996), therefore, they are responsible for the ongoing faith formation of their faculty and staff, but it is necessary that they, too, receive the same opportunities for faith formation on an ongoing basis. For example, many of the participants expressed a desire for a principal spiritual retreat or opportunities for Gospel reflection with other principals.

Faith foundation is also important to note for future hiring practices. Simply asking a principal candidate about the Catholic church or even Catholic doctrine will not get at their specific relationship with God or cultivate an understanding of what they feel their purpose is. Therefore, it is important to examine candidates' relationship with God by asking them to describe it in the interview process and give tangible examples of it in their lives.

## **Unanticipated Lessons**

In reflecting on my conversations with the 11 participants, I learned ideas worth noting when discussing Catholic school principal retention.

### **Lesson 1: The Importance of Asking for Help**

Some of the participants discussed the importance of asking for help and being able to identify team members' strengths; doing so allows the principal to delegate tasks. Thus, being a good delegator and comfortable relinquishing leadership tasks and responsibilities is integral in the job of a principal. Many of the participants in the study had employees who took on key responsibilities that ultimately lessened the principal's workload. Research confirms the important of cultivating leadership among the faculty (Seashore-Louis et al., 2010). This, in and of itself, is an essential leadership quality because organizations need a leader who can identify strengths in their team and assign and delegate tasks accordingly. This was exemplified when Rita said, "Teachers here have different gifts and [we have to know] what they're strong in." Similarly, Clare discussed the importance of asking for help and not becoming overwhelmed, stating, "Being in this position you have to recognize too where you need help... [you have to say] I'm not good at this."

### **Lesson 2: Coming from Within**

Eight of the participants started their journey as principal as a result of being tapped, or intentionally selected by a key individual. Almost all of those eight were working previously in the same school as either a teacher or an administrator and were selected for leadership by the outgoing principal at the time. It is important to know this fact for a couple of reasons. First, there is a correlation between retention and a principal not only having been tapped for the position, but also coming from within the same school community. This is not to suggest that all

principals should be selected in this way, but it is important to note that all of the principals in this study expressed a deep sense of commitment to the school community and a high level of satisfaction with the job.

A deep connection to the school community fosters a sense of purpose and belonging, which became an additional finding in this study. Therefore, it is worth noting that almost all of the participants had worked in the school in a different capacity prior to becoming principal. Additionally, some of the participants discussed that the feeling of belonging comes from having been in the same community for so long. This is demonstrated when Quiteria said, “Because I have been there so long, it very much feels like they respect me.” Much of the trust the participants receive from parents comes from having been in the same community for so long. Ultimately, principals need time to build relationships with members of the community, so when a principal comes in having already been in the school for some time, they can get to work more effectively and quickly because they do not need to prioritize this in the same way a person who is new to the school would.

### **Lesson 3: Catholic School Principals and Pay**

My findings supported most of the limited research on principal retention, but I did not find a correlation between pay and retention and/or turnover, as indicated in various studies examined (Belt, 2009; Baker et al., 2010; Cullen & Mazzeo, 2007). I expected pay to be a pronounced part of my conversations, and though all of the participants acknowledged they could make more money elsewhere, they simultaneously recognized that it was more important for them to serve in a Catholic school. Ultimately, the findings of this study suggest that Catholic school principals are not motivated by money.



## Connections to the Theoretical Framework

In relating Herzberg’s theory of motivation, or two-factor theory, to principal retention, I expected to find many principals who were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, but rather identified as somewhere between the two. To my surprise, all of my participants described themselves as either satisfied or highly satisfied (see Table 6). Herzberg’s theory is based on the premise that there exist two dimensions in the workplace, which he referred to as motivators and hygiene factors.

Herzberg believed that one could not improve one’s job satisfaction by increasing any of the seven hygiene factors. However, hygiene factors are necessary in maintaining a reasonable level of satisfaction and their absence could cause dissatisfaction. Additionally, Herzberg claimed that one can only increase employee satisfaction through the motivators. Both the hygiene factors and motivators work in tandem to ensure satisfaction among employees, but one can only increase satisfaction by increasing the motivators. In Table 6, I relate Herzberg’s hygiene factors to the context of this study.

Table 6

### *Hygiene Factors and Participant Data*

Job Dissatisfaction Influenced by Hygiene Factors	Hygiene Factors in Context
Working conditions	School building; school culture
Interpersonal relationships	Relationships with faculty and staff
Personal life	Familial support
Base pay, benefits	Fair pay; benefits
Policies and administration	Relationship with Archdiocese
Job security	Employment contracts
Supervision	Relationship with supervisor (pastor)

Table 6 demonstrates how I related Herzberg’s hygiene factors to themes discussed in participant data. As such, all participants had each hygiene factor present in some capacity. The

hygiene factors that initially concerned me most were base pay and benefits, policies and administration, and job security. After analyzing the data and reflecting on my conversations with the participants, it was evident that pay was not a significant influencer in the participants' satisfaction or willingness to stay on the job. Furthermore, each site operates independently under the supervision of a pastor (in most cases). That being said, the majority of policies are site-based decisions that allow for a great amount of autonomy at the school site. Because all of the participants described relationships with their supervisors and pastors that yielded this level of autonomy, the administration and policies hygiene factors are no longer a concern of mine.

Lastly, all principals are on year to year contracts, but are also at-will employees. That being said, much of their job security is contingent on their relationship with their supervisors. All of the principals in this study feel they have job security as a direct result of this relationship. In viewing the study's data within the theoretical framework, it is now evident that the participants in this study have all hygiene factors present, therefore allowing them to maintain a reasonable amount of satisfaction on the job.

In order to move employees from a reasonable level of satisfaction to high satisfaction, however, motivators must be present. In Table 7, I relate Herzberg's motivators to the context of this study.

Table 7

*Motivators and Participant Data*

Job Satisfaction Increased by Motivators	Motivators in Context
Achievement	Student achievement; achievement of faculty and staff
Recognition	Relationship with pastor
Responsibility	Ownership over work
Work itself	Meaningful; sense of purpose
Advancement	Opportunities for additional responsibility and promotion
Personal growth	Faith formation

Examining Herzberg's motivators within the context of the study affirms many of the recommendations made by both me and the participants. Some of the motivators are within the participants' control, and those are the factors that are most obviously contributing to their high levels of satisfaction. For example, the work itself gives the participants meaning and a sense of purpose that is a significant factor in their retention. The principals who participated in this study were passionate when describing their job as a vocation. Therefore, the "work itself" motivator is ever-present in this study's participants.

Participants also described success in terms of their students and staff, whether in discussing achievement data or the successful implementation of a new curriculum or instructional program. This achievement also serves as a motivator and contributes positively to high levels of satisfaction. The participants also hold themselves to a profound level of responsibility with respect to their work. They acknowledge that they have ownership over the work done at the school site and are given the autonomy to make decisions on an ongoing basis. Therefore, the responsibility motivator is also present among the participants.

Herzberg's motivators that remain a concern for me in examining the data are recognition and personal growth. Although the participants feel they have collaborative relationships with their supervisors, Herzberg's theory emphasizes the necessity of overt praise and recognition of accomplishments by one's supervisor. Although some of the participants did describe receiving such recognition from their pastors, the majority did not. In fact, many of the participants thanked me at the end of the interview for taking the time to speak to them and affirm the good work they were doing. In reflection on these conversations, it seemed as if no one had done that in quite some time, if ever. Another motivator that was of concern to me was personal growth. In reflecting on this motivator, it also affirms the recommendations made in Finding #2 (RQ2) for

increased training. Additionally, it also affirms my aforementioned recommendation to increase opportunities for faith formation.

In examining this study within the framework of Herzberg's theory of motivation, it is apparent that principals are satisfied due to the presence of hygiene factors. Their high levels of satisfaction, however, are due to the presence of motivators. Herzberg's motivators are not only the key to increasing principal satisfaction, but also affirm the findings presented in Chapter 3. Ensuring hygiene factors are present for all principal in the Archdiocese as well as increasing the presence of motivators can ultimately result in increased principal retention.

### **Study Limitations**

Although the findings uncovered by this study can reasonably inform future hiring practices and facilitate the development of future systems of support for principal retention, it is limited in its lack of generalizability. Naturally, one of the limitations of qualitative research is the inability to generalize findings to a broader population. This study included data from Catholic elementary school principals serving vulnerable communities in Los Angeles. As such, some of these findings are not generalizable beyond the Catholic school sector, and there exist nuances even within that sector. The lack of generalizability, however, does not detract from the purpose and meaning of the study. The purpose of this study was to hear the unique voices of each participant, validate and give meaning to their retention, and ultimately influence future retention in the ADLA and beyond.

The experiences and ideas of my 11 participants were understood through the use of a qualitative data collection method. Although I firmly believe this method allowed for the collection of rich, in-depth data, there nonetheless existed the possibility of reactivity. All of the principals who participated in my study knew me outside of the study and had worked with me

in some collaborative capacity before. Therefore, it is possible that they participated due to our existing relationship. Additionally, I acknowledge the possibility of response bias and my participants having engaged in researcher-pleasing behavior, even though I took great measures to mitigate the possibility of this occurring.

An additional limitation of my study was the sample itself. All but one of my participants was female. Although this ratio is representative of the overall Catholic elementary school principal population, only one male's voice was heard, thus limiting the study's ability to be reflective of both male and female principals' attitudes and beliefs surrounding turnover and retention.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Despite the study's limitations, its findings offer several implications and recommendations for future research. First, qualitative research should be conducted in an effort to more closely understand the concept of vocation among Catholic school principals. A principal's strong faith foundation was arguably the most significant finding in this study. Therefore, it is important to understand exactly what this means to each principal so as to discover if and how we can better foster vocations and commitments of this caliber.

On a similar note, it is important to conduct further research regarding the role of pastors and how they might contribute to turnover. Many of the study's participants described colleagues they know who have strained relationships with their pastors and how this has led them to consider quitting. Some pastors do not have the tools necessary to work with principals collaboratively and collegially. Therefore, a qualitative study that examined schools with successful pastor-principal relationships could help to identify the key components of these relationships. For example, did the relationships evolve successfully over time or had they

always been collaborative and respectful? The collection of this data could help to provide a framework for pastors regarding how to best support their school principals.

Another concept explored in my study was principals' satisfaction levels. All of the principals in my study reported being satisfied or highly satisfied and seemed to have many, if not all, of Herzberg's hygiene and motivation factors present. A comparative study of dissatisfied principals versus satisfied principals in the same Archdiocese or school system could help to analyze exactly which factors are missing in the majority of schools and help the Archdiocese prioritize target areas for growth.

Lastly, the concept of tapping was explored briefly in this study, but based on the number of participants who found their way to the principalship as a result of tapping, this is a concept worth exploring in its own study. It would be interesting to examine how many of the veteran principals in the Archdiocese came to their roles as a result of being tapped. For example, a mixed-methods longitudinal study could follow principals who were tapped versus those who were not as a basis for comparison.

### **Significance of Findings**

Existing research reveals a gap in understanding principal retention in both the public and private sector. Moreover, there is very little research involving Catholic schools. With turnover rates growing by the year, it is imperative that the ADLA and other school systems more closely understand the catalysts for those who stay to potentially change the trajectory. Turnover and retention are two sides of the same coin, and as such examining retention more closely has the ability to help us understand turnover better than we do currently.

Leadership is second only to teaching among school-related influences on student success (Manna, 2015). Therefore, it is imperative that we study principal retention as principals become

increasingly more effective in their first 3 years (Clark et al., 2009). Research estimates that it takes approximately 5 years to improve instruction and fully implement new policies and procedures to influence student achievement (Seashore-Louis et al., 2010). Therefore, when a principal leaves a school, it significantly interrupts the trajectory of the school as a whole.

An effective school principal is integral to that school's success, but a principal cannot possibly create substantial change within a school community in just a year or two because it takes an average of 5 years to mobilize a vision and improve teaching quality (Horng et al., 2010). High levels of turnover can be extremely detrimental to low-income school communities in particular. Schools in low-income communities suffer more turnover historically than those in more affluent areas. Therefore, this study contributes to the greater body of research on turnover and retention and makes tangible recommendations for future hiring characteristics and systems of support to increase principal retention.

### **Conclusion**

I began this research with a desire to connect with other principals and hear their stories. More specifically, I wanted to understand why they get up each and every day and do what they do. Being a principal myself, I knew my *why*, but I wanted to know what it was like for others. Having been a part of the system for the last 10 years, I have watched many principals move on, leaving their communities in precarious situations and without stable leadership. I could point to the reasons why, as many of my participants alluded to, but what I did not understand was why we tend to focus so much on those who leave instead of talking to the tireless heroes who stay. I felt that the answer was within them.

The findings in this study offer an understanding of the factors contributing to principal retention in Catholic elementary schools in Los Angeles. Additionally, they suggest

recommendations to increase principal retention moving forward. This study contributes a fresh perspective on an age-old problem. It opens the door to the possibility of systemic change with respect to retention and provides tangible examples of how to support principals in their roles. As stated in the research time and time again, leadership is second only to teaching among school-related influences on student success (Manna, 2015; Marzano et al., 2005). Therefore, it is imperative that the ADLA and other school systems prioritize principal support and ultimately, retention, given its tremendous influence on students and school cultures.



## APPENDIX A: Preliminary Survey Email

Hello, Principals!

My name is Allison Hurtt and I am both a doctoral student at UCLA and a principal here in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles. I am contacting you to ask if you would agree to participate in a research study on Catholic school principal retention in the ADLA by completing the brief survey attached. Participation is completely voluntary and your identity, in addition to your responses, will be kept completely confidential. Thank you so very much & God bless!

# Factors Contributing to Principal Retention: Preliminary Survey

Your participation in this survey is voluntary and all responses will be kept strictly confidential.

\* Required

Email address \*

Your email

What is your first and last name? \*

Your answer

What is your email address? \*

Your answer

What is the name of your school? \*

Your answer

How many years (including the current school year) have you been principal at your school site? \*

Your answer

Have you been a principal in a different location prior to this school site? \*

Yes

No

What percentage of your students qualify for the free and reduced-price lunch program? \*

Your answer

Are you a Religious or layperson? \*

Religious

Layperson

Would you be willing to be contacted by me for an interview pertaining to Catholic school principal retention? (Selected participants will receive a \$20 Amazon gift card) \*

Yes

No

If your answer to the previous question was yes, what is the best phone number to contact you on?

Your answer

Submit

## APPENDIX C: Recruitment Email

Dear [participant's name],

Thank you for completing my preliminary survey as part of a larger study on principal retention in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles. My name is Allison Hurtt and I am both a doctoral student at UCLA and a principal here in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles. I am contacting you to commend you on the many years you have dedicated to your school community and ask if you would agree to participate in a research study on Catholic school principal retention in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles. This research aims to identify the factors contributing to elementary Catholic school principal retention in the ADLA. Participation is completely voluntary and your identity, in addition to your responses, will be kept completely confidential.

If you agree to participate, I will interview you for about 60-90 minutes in a quiet, private location of your choosing. During the interview, I will ask you questions relating to the job of a Catholic school principal, in addition to factors relating to retention and turnover. In appreciation of your time, you will be provided a \$20 Amazon gift card at the completion of the interview.

If you wish to participate in this study, please respond to this email with the best phone number to reach you and I will call you to schedule a time at your convenience for the interview.

Thank you for your interest in this study!

God bless,

Allison Hurtt

## APPENDIX D: Informed Consent

University of California, Los Angeles

### CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

#### **TITLE OF STUDY**

Factors Contributing to Catholic School Principal Retention: A Study of Principal Retention in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles

#### **PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR**

Allison J. Hurtt

University of California, Los Angeles



#### **Why am I being asked to participate?**

You are being asked to take part in this research study because you have served in your position for five consecutive years or longer and have a student body that qualifies for at least 50% free or reduced-price lunch.

#### **What is the purpose of this study?**

The purpose of this study is to identify the factors contributing to elementary Catholic school principal retention in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles.

#### **What will happen if I take part in this research study?**

If you volunteer to participate in this study, the researcher will ask you to do the following:

- Participate in a 40-60-minute interview in a quiet, private location of your choosing
- Respond to questions pertaining to your experience as a Catholic school principal and Catholic school principal turnover and retention generally
- Agree to be recorded (auditory only) using two recording devices

#### **How long will I be in the research study?**

If necessary, the study will involve a follow up by phone-call to clarify responses given in the interview.

#### **Are there any potential risks or discomforts that I can expect from this study?**

There are no anticipated risks or discomforts.

#### **Are there any potential benefits if I participate?**

The results of this research may positively inform future systems of support for Catholic school principals.

#### **Will I be paid for participating?**

You will be receiving a \$20 Amazon gift card for your participation in this study.

**Will information about me and my participation be kept confidential?**

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can identify you will remain confidential. It will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Your responses during our interview will be kept completely confidential. Every effort will be made by the researcher to preserve your confidentiality including the following:

- Assigning code names/numbers for participants that will be used on all research notes and documents
- Keeping notes, interview transcriptions, and any other identifying participant information in a locked file cabinet in the personal possession of the research

**What are my rights if I take part in this study?**

- You can choose whether or not you want to be in this study, and you may withdraw your consent and discontinue participation at any time.
- Whatever decision you make, there will be no penalty to you, and no loss of benefits to which you were otherwise entitled.
- You may refuse to answer any questions that you do not want to answer and still remain in the study.

**Who can I contact if I have questions about this study?**

- **The research team:**
  - If you have any questions, comments or concerns about the research, you can talk to Allison Hurtt at ( [REDACTED] ) or [REDACTED]
  - You can also contact the study’s chair, Dr. Robert Cooper, at [REDACTED]
- **UCLA Office of the Human Research Protection Program (OHRPP):**

If you have questions about your rights as a research subject, or you have concerns or suggestions and you want to talk to someone other than the researchers, you may contact the UCLA OHRPP by phone: ( [REDACTED] ); by email: [REDACTED] or by mail: Box 951406, Los Angeles, CA 90095-1406.

**SIGNATURE OF STUDY PARTICIPANT**

*I have read and I understand the provided information and have had the opportunity to ask questions. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason and without cost. I understand that I will be given a copy of this consent form. I voluntarily agree to take part in this study.*

*You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.*

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**SIGNATURE OF PERSON OBTAINING CONSENT**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Person Obtaining Consent

\_\_\_\_\_  
Contact Number

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## APPENDIX E: Interview Protocol

Date:

Time:

Location:

Interviewer: Allison Hurtt

Interviewee:

Preferred Contact Number:

Preferred Contact Email:

- I. Interviewer thanks the interviewee for their time.
  - a. Thank you very much for agreeing to be interviewed by me today as I conduct interviews with school leaders to gather research for my dissertation at UCLA.
- II. Interviewer introduces self and establishes the purpose for the interview to the interviewee.
  - a. My name is Allison Hurtt and I am conducting research on understanding the factors contributing to Catholic school principal retention in the Los Angeles Archdiocese, and more specifically in urban communities. I want to talk to you about your personal experiences as a school principal. I am interested in this area because I believe it will inform our school district's retention efforts and hiring practice. Do you have any questions about the research?
- III. Interviewer gains permission to record the interview.
  - a. As a part of this process, I would like to audio record our interview with your permission. Though I will be taking notes, I would like to be able to go back and listen to our conversation so as to accurately reflect your ideas and perspective. Do I have your permission to record this interview?
    - i. Yes                      No
- IV. Interviewer acquires informed consent and established confidentiality with the interviewee.
  - a. As the researcher of this project, I want to assure you that this interview will be absolutely confidential. I will only use pseudonyms in the final report and the transcript from the audio recording will not identify you as a participant.
  - b. Do you have any questions? YES      NO
  - c. Are you willing to participate in the interview? YES                      NO
- V. Interviewer asks questions.
  1. How long have you been an administrator in the Catholic school system?
  2. What originally attracted you to Catholic school administration?
  3. How is the job different from what you originally thought it would be?
    - a. What aspects of the job are similar to what you thought it would be?
  4. What do you think were the key reasons you were hired for the current position?
    - a. Can you give me some information about your background (e.g. years teaching in public or Catholic, prior administration, other kinds of work experience, etc.)?
  5. Describe the demographics of your school and the community you serve.
  6. How long have you been as administrator in your current school?

- a. Were you a teacher at this same site, or an administrator at another site prior to this role?
  7. Describe your most rewarding day on the job. What made it so rewarding?
  8. Describe your worst day on the job. What made it so difficult?
  9. Have there been times where you considered leaving your position as principal? If so, describe the reasons contributing to those feelings.
  10. Describe the two most difficult responsibilities of your job as principal.
    - a. So what were the reasons that led you to stay...?
  11. Think about a positive experience you recently had with one or more teachers. Please describe that experience for me.
  12. Now think about a negative experience you recently had with one or more teachers. Please describe that experience for me.
  13. Describe the two most rewarding aspects of the job.
  14. Tell me about two experiences that describe your relationship with the community.
    - a. Describe the resources or support that you have received as principal from the community.
  15. Describe your pastor's relationship with the school.
    - a. Describe your relationship with your pastor.
    - b. How, if at all, does your pastor impact the way you do your job?
    - c. Describe the resources or support that you have received as principal from your pastor.
  16. Describe how your faith impacts your work.
  17. How, if at all, does the district impact the way you do your job?
    - a. Describe the resources or support you have received as principal from the district
    - b. What does the district/DCS does that contributes to your retention, if anything?
  18. What would you say are the top three reasons you have stayed on the job?
    - a. What would you say, then, is the best part of your job?
  19. What message would you give to DCS (Department of Catholic Schools) and our superintendent to help principals be successful in urban Catholic schools?
  20. What recommendations, if any, would you make to the principal hiring process?
  21. What recommendation, if any, would you make to DCS regarding supporting principals?
  22. Is there anything else you want to talk about?
  23. Are there any questions I didn't ask that you think I should have asked you? If so, what are they?
- VI. Interviewer thanks the interviewee and explains next steps.
- a. Thank you very much. I really appreciate your time. The next steps in this process are for me to spend time writing notes based on our time together and transcribing the recording. After transcribing the interview and rereading, I may reach out to you to clarify information and ask follow up questions. Would you prefer that I follow up in person, by phone, or email? Additionally, I will begin analyzing the transcripts from the principals I have interviewed with the goal of discovering factors influencing principal retention in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles. If you would like to review the transcript before I use it in my study, I would be happy to share it with you.



## APPENDIX F: Schedule of the Research

Completion of formation of Doctoral Committee: Mid-June '19 to Mid-July '19

Preliminary Orals Examination: Mid Sep. '19

IRB Approval: Late Sep '19 to mid Oct. '19

Interview 1: Week of October 21<sup>st</sup>, 2019

Interview 2: Week of October 28<sup>th</sup>, 2019

Interview 3: Week of November 4<sup>th</sup>, 2019

Interview 4: Week of November 11<sup>th</sup>, 2019

Interview 5: Week of November 18<sup>th</sup>, 2019

Interviews 6 & 7: Week of November 25<sup>th</sup>, 2019

Interview 8: Week of December 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2019

Interview 9: Week of December 9<sup>th</sup>, 2019

Interview 10: Week of December 16<sup>th</sup>, 2019

Interview 11: Week of January 6<sup>th</sup>, 2020

Interview 12: Week of January 13<sup>th</sup>, 2020

Data Analysis (Chap. 4) & Meeting with Chair: Mid-late January 2020

Data analysis & Chap. 4, continued: February & March 2020

Chap. 5 and Addition of Notes by Chair: April 2020

Final Oral Examination: Early May 2020

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