A Principal's Perspective on the Role of Principal Teacher Trust in a High Performing School

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Product II: Problem of Practice Inquiry

A Principal’s Perspective on the Role of Principal Teacher Trust in a High Performing School

By: Michele Gause Broughton

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

SOUTHERN METHODIST UNIVERSITY

Annette Caldwell Simmons School of Education and Human Development

March 1, 2021
DISSERTATION APPROVAL

This dissertation submitted by Michele Gause Broughton has been read and approved by the following faculty members of the Annette Caldwell Simmons School of Education and Human Development at Southern Methodist University. The final copy has been examined by the Dissertation Committee and the signatures which appear here verify the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated and that the dissertation is now given the final approval with reference to content, form and mechanical accuracy.

The dissertation is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education.

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Executive Summary

There is an increased lack of trust that continues to exist in urban secondary schools among teachers and between teachers and leaders, particularly in the areas of taking the principal at their word, being able to express feelings in the workplace, and believing that the principal is an effective manager. This problem has negatively impacted the ability of principals and teachers to effectively establish healthy professional relationships and improve campus climate. This trust issue could be the result of an inability or refusal of the leader to address the gaps that exists in the relationship. This research study focused on the impact that a principal has on effective school reform through the establishment of trust relationships with teachers. The study explored the trust gap that currently exists in a high performing secondary school through the perspective of the five facets of trust that have been established by researchers, Megan Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2000). It is clear to most educators that a trust gap will always impede the sustainability of school reform efforts if it is not addressed. The barriers to establishing trust must be addressed to see the changes in the quality of education that students rightfully deserve.

It is important to note that this research study took place during the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic while schools were closed to in-person instruction. Due to a mandatory quarantine and the onset of virtual schooling for school districts, the opportunity to visit the campus and conduct face to face interviews was not permitted. Therefore, my data collection took place through virtual interview sessions with participants. Close attention was given to participants’ responses when questioned about leader teacher trust actions and behaviors under normal circumstances and during the constraints of that were created by the COVID-19 pandemic. It was important to determine if the trust bond had been impacted in any way as a result of shifting from a physical school setting to a virtual school platform.

The research study focused on a principal’s perspectives of the role of principal teacher trust in a high performing middle school. The study revealed a set of six guiding leader actions and behaviors, called principalisms, that were evident in the principal teacher interactions that occurred at the school. The principalisms allowed for her to connect with her team on a human level: a) The leader walked the talk and was dependable. The leader made it a habit to show up for her teachers in meaningful ways. b) The leader gave and solicited feedback which demonstrated her ability to hear and see her teachers. c) The leader allowed for vulnerability and was open, caring, and empathetic in the work. d) The leader engaged the team members in frequent touchpoints to demonstrate that she was present and visible in the work. e) The leader valued the contribution of every team member and expected for everyone to work for the good of the order of the students and the school. f) The leader articulated clear expectations by establishing parameters for the work and how it should be accomplished. In contrast, the study also focused on the tactical leader actions and behaviors that were displayed by the principal to accomplish short term goals while fostering intentional interactions that united the team around a common goal. The data collected in the study concluded that the presence of the principalisms and knowledge of when to use tactical leader actions and behaviors made it possible for the leader and teachers to establish a trust bond, maintain a positive school climate, and uphold the school’s high academic achievement.
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Introduction

For decades both legislators and K-12 educators have been appealing for school reform. Stakeholders continue to witness the impact of federal policies on state and local school reform efforts and how well-intentioned policies do not always serve the intended groups. In an attempt to support school systems, a southwestern state education agency recently unveiled a new policy in the form of a model for school effectiveness at the district level. The new state policy agenda item consists of model components for school districts to follow. What is notable about the framework is that it provides a focus for each school district and key actions for each campus and campus leaders. The entire scope of the model for effective schools is focused on best practices that are implemented by high performing schools and highly effective leaders that yield improvements in teaching and learning. The purpose of the model is to give all districts consistency in the use of research-based best practices and to ensure that schools have the most appropriate resources to ensure continuous improvement in performance (Texas Education Agency, 2021).

One area of the continuous school improvement cycle that often goes unnoticed is the role of trust in schools. Researchers Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2000) and Bryk & Schneider (2002) have concluded that principal-teacher trust is one of the single most important determining factors in the success of a school. Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2000) assert that schools are highly complex organizations and that establishing a culture of trust in the principal is an essential ingredient to student achievement and high performing schools. However, there is a problem in urban secondary schools where a lack of principal-teacher trust exists. Despite the teambuilding efforts and professional developments that are promoted by urban school districts, climate survey data indicates that there are issues in school climates between the administration and teachers (2000).
One urban school district in a southwestern state implemented the usage of climate surveys twice per school year, once in the fall and once in the spring, to determine the organizational health of each school. The climate surveys consists of six sections and 37 questions that focus on district and campus beliefs and priorities, elements of a positive culture and environment, evidence of a culture of feedback and support from the campus leadership team, promotion of a college-going culture to students and families throughout the building, evidence of teacher-teacher trust behaviors, and evidence of teacher-principal trust behaviors. Faculty and staff are given a confidential link from an independent survey firm to complete the climate survey. The climate survey and data collection process provide invaluable data for the district and for the campus principals. Upon completion of the survey process, the superintendent receives a district climate survey by grade level and feeder pattern, and school type for the past three years. Principals receive a similar report with three-year data trends, however, the principal report aggregates the survey data by overall district results, feeder pattern results, and school type results for each of the sections surveyed.

Analysis of these data indicate that there is an increased lack of trust that continues to exist in urban secondary schools among teachers and between teachers and leaders, particularly in the areas of taking the principal at their word, being able to express feelings in the workplace, and believing that the principal is an effective manager. This problem has negatively impacted the ability of principals and teachers to effectively establish healthy professional relationships and improve campus climate. This trust issue could be the result of an inability or refusal of the leader to address the gaps that exists in the relationship. This research study focused on the impact that a principal has on effective school reform through the establishment of trust relationships with teachers. The study explored the trust gap that currently exists in a high performing secondary school through the perspective of the five
facets of trust that have been established by researchers, Megan Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2000). It is clear to most educators that a trust gap will always impede the sustainability of school reform efforts if it is not addressed. The barriers to establishing trust must be addressed to see the changes in the quality of education that students rightfully deserve.

It is important to note that this research study took place during the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic while schools were closed to in-person instruction. Due to a mandatory quarantine and the onset of virtual schooling for school districts, the opportunity to visit the campus and conduct face to face interviews was not permitted. Therefore, my data collection took place through virtual interview sessions with participants. Close attention was given to participants’ responses when questioned about leader teacher trust actions and behaviors under normal circumstances and during the constraints of that were created by the COVID-19 pandemic. It was important to determine if the trust bond had been impacted in any way as a result of shifting from a physical school setting to a virtual school platform.

The research study focused on a principal’s perspectives of the role of principal teacher trust in a high performing middle school. The study identified a set of guiding leader actions and behaviors, that I called principalisms, that were evident in the principal teacher interactions that occurred at the school. In contrast, the study also focused on the tactical leader actions and behaviors that were displayed by the principal to accomplish short term goals while fostering intentional interactions that united the team around a common goal. The data collected in the study concluded that the presence of the core leader actions and behaviors, that I labeled as principalisms, and knowledge of when to use tactical leader actions and behaviors made it possible for the leader and teachers to establish a trust bond, maintain a positive school climate, and uphold the school’s high academic achievement.
Statement of the Problem

The Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 places a strong emphasis on state education agencies and local school district to foster and support the development of excellent teachers and leaders, strong instructional programs, and a positive school culture to impact student academic achievement. One southwestern state has designed a model school framework that provides timelines and structures for districts to ensure the success of schools. The one area that has been overlooked is not focusing enough on the development of the school leader to be able to foster trust through positive and effective teacher interactions. While the outcomes for managing and supporting the schools are clear, there are no competencies to address the ability of the leader to foster trust-building relationships with teachers that will ultimately impact student achievement, a positive climate, and the retention of the most effective teachers. This qualitative study was designed to focus on the leader beliefs and actions that foster principal-teacher trust in high performing secondary schools.

A possible cause of this problem is that trust has not been prioritized as highly in the educational setting as in corporate environments. Another possible cause may be that secondary principals may not know how to build principal-teacher trust amidst other responsibilities. A qualitative case study which investigates a principal’s perspective on the role of principal-teacher trust in high performing urban secondary schools could advance practice in the area of trust building.

Covey (1991) states, “Trust—or the lack of it—is at the root of success or failure in relationships and in the bottom-line results of business, industry, education, and government” (p. 31). One might believe it is nearly impossible to accomplish any collaborative task with fidelity without a sense of trust in the atmosphere. However, many leaders in corporations and schools alike are guilty of not valuing the power of a trust relationship in the work of the
organization. When people trust one another in the work there is a high probability for the outcomes of both success and satisfaction (Brown et al, 2015). A wealth of research exists on the definition of trust in specific workplace settings along with the definition of character in categorizing one as being trustworthy. A trustworthy leader exhibits predictable trust behaviors and transparently offers honest and caring communication exchanges with team members. Tschannen-Moran has contributed numerous research studies on the facets of trust and the parts that make a relationship work, particularly between principal and teacher (2003, 20014).

**Defining Trust**

The literature has provided a broad spectrum of definitions for trust and more importantly, principal-teacher trust. According to the research base, trust is one of the most impactful parts of school culture. Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2000) address faculty trust in the principal and the five facets that contribute to judgments of trust in schools: benevolence, honesty, openness, competence, and consistency.

**Five Facets of Trust**

Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2000) wrote an extensive review of the literature base on trust in organizations. The meta-analysis on trust encompassed over forty years of studies on the topic, the authors mentioned the significance of the five facets of trust and how they were related to the collegial and instructional behaviors of the principal as well as to the school climate. Teacher professionalism, academic press and community engagement were the lenses that the authors choose to explore the working relationship between principals and teachers. In this case, the working definition of trust was defined by the five facets of trust captured by Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2000):
- **Benevolence** – Exercising a spirit of good will in support of the well-being of another person
- **Honesty** – Telling the truth and having a sense of integrity
- **Openness** – Willingness to share information, control, and leadership capacity
- **Competence** – Adoption of the necessary knowledge and skills, work habits, and systems that supports the principal’s ability to lead a school
- **Consistency** – Displays actions that are reliable across time and settings

Various authors have defined trust in multiple ways. For example, Kutsyuruba, Walker, & Noonan (2016) explained that trust is how one engages in a mutual interaction with a vulnerability about them. Kutsyuruba et al (2016) stated it is important that the receiving party embodies the values of values of benevolence, competence, reliability, openness, and honesty as emphasized by Hoy and Tschannen-Moran (2000). Kutsyuruba et al (2016) also mention Mishra (1996) and the identified values of respect, wisdom, and care as a part of various levels of trust in the contexts of societal, institutional, interpersonal, and personal. Finally, Bryk and Schneider (2002) addressed trust as a relational aspect between principals, teachers, students, and other stakeholders. According to Zeinabadi and Rastegarpour (2010), other researchers defined trust as faith in and loyalty to the leader, trustworthiness of the other party, faith in the leader, loyalty in the leader, and trust as an individual’s or group’s willingness to be vulnerable to another party based on the confidence exhibited by the leader and the degree to which the five facets of trust are embodied.

For the purposes of this study, I used the five facets of trust as identified by Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2000) to explore the trust relationship between a principal and teachers based on the leader’s ability to be benevolent, reliable, competent, honest, and open. In this study I looked for the quality of the relationships that had been established to determine if a leader could impact the climate and culture of an organization, grow leaders from the
faculty under his or her leadership style, and transform the organization as a result of the trust relationships that had been established.

**Why is Principal-Teacher Trust Important?**

Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2000) and Tahir et al. (2015) explained that education is a complex process. They explored how one key variable, the interdependence of groups and individuals on one another within schools, is contingent upon trust being present. When trust is present, then school goals can be accomplished and a positive school climate can be established. The authors believed that it is the work of the principal to leverage both collegial and instructional factors to gain trust within schools.

Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2000) asserted that principal-teacher trust relationships, principal leadership behaviors, school climate, and student achievement are connected. The authors identified the extent to which trustworthy leadership is related to the cultivation of both an excellent school climate and high student achievement. In this study that was conducted twenty years ago, the researchers’ first hypothesis was that faculty trust in the principal would be significantly and positively related to collegial leadership behaviors. Secondly, faculty trust in the principal would be significantly and positively related to instructional leadership behaviors. Thirdly, faculty trust in the principal would be significantly and positively related to faculty perceptions of the professionalism of their colleagues. Then, faculty trust in the principal would be significantly and positively related to faculty perceptions of academic press. Next, faculty trust in the principal would be significantly and positively related to faculty perceptions of community engagement. Lastly, faculty trust in the principal would be significantly and positively related to student achievement. For the purposes of this research study on the role of principal-teacher trust in a high performing middle school, I focused specifically on two of the seven hypotheses presented by Tschannen-Moran & Hoy (2000). I
closely examined faculty trust in the principal based on collegial leadership behaviors and faculty trust in the principal as it related to high student achievement.

Significance of the Study

The importance of principal-teacher trust is essential to the proper operation of schools and it is often the principal who initiates and establishes trust in high performing schools (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy (2000). When trust is present between a principal and teachers, then improving student achievement and achieving a positive school climate are made possible (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy (2000). Therefore, it is important to understand the perspectives of principals on the importance of principal-teacher trust in high performing schools.

Research Question

The central research question to be explored is in the research study is: What are the most significant leader beliefs and leader-teacher interactions that foster principal-teacher trust in high performing schools? This study will explore the relationship between a principal’s beliefs about principal-teacher trust and the subsequent actions that are experienced as a result of the leader’s beliefs.

Literature Review

Trust is an essential component of providing an excellent education to students. Without trusting relationships in schools, the ability to educate students at deep levels becomes limited and children will ultimately bear the burden of the dysfunctional relationship. Unfortunately, if a trust relationship is non-existent between the principal and the teaching team, then a hindrance may also exist for the school in the achievement of student success.
Role of Trust in Schools

Tschannen-Moran (2014) asserted that trust is the glue and the lubricant that binds everyone together around the work in schools. Not only does it bind, it also lubricates the machine of the organization, also known as the teachers and leaders, to be able to work well together. Trust is a uniquely developed gauge of how a leader’s investment can impact a teacher’s ability to wholeheartedly engage in the work. Trust is a phenomenal attribute to have in schools because it cannot be bought, coerced or forced. Tschannen-Moran (2014) asserted that trust is a choice that has the ability to impact a school’s climate and culture. Regardless of whether a teacher elects to trust a campus principal or not, the decision has an indirect impact on student achievement, on improving students’ success, and on students’ ability to build confidence in themselves.

The culture of the school plays a significant role in supporting and sustaining trust. According to Rice (2018) principal actions set the tone for school trust. It is the principal who is responsible for ensuring a healthy school climate and some districts across the United States utilize climate surveys to gauge the level of principal-teacher or teacher-teacher trust that has been fostered in a school. Researchers note that schools with high trust generally had high gains in student achievement and school climate that sustained over time (Tschannen-Moran, 2014; Rice 2018).

Nwandiko (2017) asserted that an intensive focus on trust-building social interactions lead to increased teacher effectiveness and mitigates teachers exiting the campus or the profession. It is important for principals to look beyond the numbers and quantitative measures to identify the unspoken narrative of trust-building in schools. Leaders must hear the unspoken words and feel the undercurrent within a school to reflect on what it might take to foster trust between the leader and the teachers within the school. Much of the existing research addresses
the teachers’ perspectives on what makes a principal trustworthy. However, the literature did not focus heavily on the perspective of the principal in the development of trust in schools. This is a notable gap that is worth exploring to determine if the views of campus leaders affirm the assertions made about the critical role trust has in the success of a school. It is important for the leader to be able to articulate views on social interactions and role-based trust.

Nwandiko (2017) established the fact that trust can be generated and nurtured when a leader recognizes behaviors and actions matter to teachers. Nwandiko explained that role-based trust is different than other modes of trust. It is the role-based trust, or trust that is distinctively based on the role and responsibilities of the principal, that is most highly considered by teachers when determining whether a leader is trustworthy or not (p. 23). Researchers have found that principals who consistently exhibit role-based trustworthiness often have teachers with high trust relationships with them. While Nwandiko (2017) acknowledged the significance of the various forms of trust that exists like dispositional, third-party, and rule-based, the author also articulates a finding of Sutherland & Yoshida (2015) who noted that the most impactful form of trust for school principals is role-based trust. Dispositional trust focuses on an individual’s personality, third party trust is rooted in gossip, and rule-based trust is contingent upon one being a member of an organization. Of the various types of trust described, role-based trust is the only form of trust that is focused on others. Role based trust challenges the leader to display the five facets of trust in addition to acknowledging the behaviors and actions that matter the most to the team.

**Principal Behavior and Trust in Schools**

A common theme that emerged in the literature on the topic of principal-teacher trust is the fact that there appears to be a relationship between high quality interactions of teachers and the principal that fosters high performance in the classroom (Tschannen-Moran and Hoy, 2000). One might find this approach as a means of judging the execution of role-based trust through the
observation of the principal's expectations of teachers’ performance in the classroom. Price (2015) challenged the role of the campus principal by highlighting the importance of engaging in trust-building behaviors and interactions as a means of increasing teachers’ work satisfaction, commitment to teaching, and overall self-efficacy in the classroom. Campus leaders who focus their attention on trust-building behaviors could mitigate the onset of low-quality social interactions that could result in a low teacher performance in the classroom, drive teacher turnover, or force teachers to leave the profession (Nwandiko, 2017; Price, 2015).

According to Modoono (2017), campus principals, who are often viewed as change agents with varying leadership styles, are drivers of the social leader interactions in school organizations. It is the campus principal who has the influential ability to impact the school’s system of interactions. One might assume that the trust behaviors observed on a campus between a principal and teachers can be attributed to trust behaviors that have been established, modeled and encouraged by the principal.

Modoono (2017) established that a trust factor can be developed between a principal and teachers in five ways including:

1. Fostering of collaboration and community,
2. Demonstration of honesty of the leader to the teachers,
3. Creating a forum for discussion,
4. Saying yes as often as possible, and
5. Fostering focus on the vision of the school and the work at hand.

Other researchers (Nwandiko, 2017; Zeinabadi & Rastegarpour, 2010) also noted ways in which trust relationships between a principal and teachers can be nurtured. Nwandiko (2017) framed for practitioners the power of a two-way conversation between the leader and teachers. The researcher believed that such an informal interaction that is purposeful and focuses on advancing
teacher interests is a valuable means of enacting growth in the teacher and fostering trust.

Similar to Nwandiko, researchers Zeinabadi and Rastegarpour (2010) focused on the work of the transformational leader. The researchers asserted that the transformational leader can push the boundary of what teachers believe that they are capable of doing alone. As described by Bass (1985), it is through the intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration, inspirational motivation, and being an idealized influencer that the leader is able to foster trust while growing teacher practice.

It is the role of the campus principal to foster a collegial and collaborative school culture and a productive professional learning community (Nwandiko, 2017). Trust can be established by a campus leader and nurtured on a regular basis. If one was to think of teachers as flowers in need of watering, the human interactions and human investments made by the principal can be likened to watering flowers and watching them grow. One might assume that if the principal takes the time to invest in teachers upon arrival to the campus, then the leader, teachers and the school will reap the benefits of the trust relationship.

**Benefits of Trust Relationships in Schools**

Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2000) reviewed trust research in the school setting and addressed trust from a sociological perspective and the role trust plays in society. The researchers referred to the work of Dirks and Ferrin (2002) and the role of the respected leaders who have outstanding character and personality. The potential for shared openness and transparency in communication between the leader and the faculty could make developing trust easier for these types of leaders. Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2000) also mentioned Scarborough (2006) whose research focused on the leader’s ability to use leadership capacity to “spark confidence and trustworthiness among them” (p. 170).
Leaders must consider the five facets of trust have been proposed by Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2000). The five facets include benevolence, reliability, competence, honesty and openness. The authors reviewed related studies and address various schools of thought on the subject of trust in the western hemisphere and in other places around the world. Tahir et al (2015) addressed faculty trust in the principal and student-teacher trust which both led to high levels of academic motivation and performance.

The social interactions of the principal with teachers acts as a driver in the development and execution of social interactions in school organizations (Price, 2015). If the leader models or approves of the interactions, then teachers are more likely to mimic the same behaviors. It is incumbent upon the leader to interact with the teachers on a human level by being real, cordial, collegial, and approachable. When there is trust between the principal and teachers, the benefits are bountiful. Teachers remain in the profession, work harder to improve teaching practices, and go above and beyond to do what it takes to positively impact student achievement (Nwandiko, 2017).

Fostering Principal-Teacher Trust in Schools

Researchers Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2015) explained that trust is the essential ingredient in high performing schools. The researchers also noted that education is a complex process and there are multiple factors that impact the teaching and learning processes. The authors explored how one key variable, the interdependence of groups and individuals on one another within schools, is contingent upon trust being present. When trust is present, then school goals can be accomplished, and a positive school climate can be established. The two authors made seven hypotheses in the study that examined the extent to which trustworthy leadership is connected to the cultivation of both an excellent school climate and high student achievement.
The researchers hypothesized the following:

- *Faculty trust in the principal would be significantly and positively related to collegial leadership behaviors.*
- *Faculty trust in the principal would be significantly and positively related to instructional leadership behaviors.*
- *Faculty trust in the principal would be significantly and positively related to faculty perceptions of the professionalism of their colleagues.*
- *Faculty trust in the principal would be significantly and positively related to faculty perceptions of academic press.*
- *Faculty trust in the principal would be significantly and positively related to faculty perceptions of community engagement.*
- *Faculty trust in the principal would be significantly and positively related to student achievement.*
- *A substantial proportion of the variance in student achievement will be explained by a composite of principal behaviors of school climate variables.*

The authors found that teachers’ perceptions of collegiality, instructional leadership, professionalism of colleagues, academic press, and community engagement played a role in their ability to trust the principal. The researchers also found trust, leader behaviors, and school climate to be correlated with student achievement. The researchers concluded that it was the work of the principal to leverage both collegial and interpersonal leadership to gain trust within schools.

Vodicka (2007) also recognizes the sheer number of dynamics that can impact the trust relationship between a principal and teachers. In an effort to remedy deficits in social interactions, the researcher makes leaders aware of Buskens’ *outdegree*, which is a method of
measuring one’s personal interactions relative to how many total possible connections one can have. Vodicka points to the need for principals be intentional about connecting with teachers on a consistent basis to nurture the development and maintenance of a trust-building relationships.

Price (2015) further expounds upon the importance of principals’ social interactions with teachers. The researcher notes that principals need time and space to develop relationships to yield organizational benefits. Principals must learn to be flexible and invest in high quality interpersonal relationships early on in the relationship to offset the times when challenging situations do not allow for relationship building. One consideration for principals might be to consider adopting additional knowledge, skills, and systems that allow for a more efficient manner of completing job duties while yielding time for meaningful human interactions (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015).

A principal’s high expectations for teachers fosters opportunities for open dialogue, a sense of belonging and increases teacher confidence in completing job duties (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015; Nwandiko, 2017). High expectations validate the trust that the leader has in the abilities of each team member. This is one way that the leader communicates the value that the teacher has to the school and to the meeting the goals that have been established. High expectations require a leader to engage in frequent social interactions with teachers to celebrate the work that is being done, revisit goals and set new ones, while determining where additional professional support may be needed to aid in the success of the teacher overall. Leaders must spend time developing social skills in principal preparation training. Leaders are trained in principal preparation programs on how to manage things and establish a vision for improving student achievement. It is important for leaders to value the development of trust while working
to improve teacher proficiency in the classroom instruction and student outcomes (TschannenMoran & Gareis, 2015b).

Principals must be adept at communicating the right information in the most appropriate manner for the message to be received by teachers. Principals must also take the time to survey the campus, either independently or using a campus climate tool, such as a survey, to determine the most appropriate communication approaches and human interactions that are necessary to gain the trust of the teachers. Nwandiko (2017) focuses on the need for principals to be motivational, intentional and ongoing in establishing trust-building relationships. The author also mentions the importance of removing the situational and communication barriers that can hinder positive social interactions such as dictatorship, authoritarianism, lack of follow through, or not providing assistance when needed.

Lack of Trust, Establishing Initial Trust, and Re-Establishing Broken Trust

Kutsyuruba et al (2011) explain how fragile trust really is and how essential it is for principals to be aware of their role in establishing trust relationships and restoring broken trust when necessary. The authors address the reasons why trust is broken in schools and include a myriad of reasons such as: the relationship between policy and practice, principals being viewed as the government or its entity, careless comments, betrayal of confidence, or careless actions, or not following through on promises (p. 87-88). Findings to a qualitative study conducted by Kutsyuruba et al (2011) were insightful. The authors found that principals thought it was significant for trust to exist in school settings. However, the authors explain that the establishment of trust takes focused attention, effort, and time. In order for trust relationships to be re-established, a principal would need to make a conscientious decision to engage in actions that help to re-establish relationships and build them back up.
Based on the study, it is evident that school leaders play an important role in establishing trust. If there is an issue with trust, principals must acknowledge the problem exists, offer to address it, and follow up (p. 87-88). The authors concluded that restorative practices play an integral role in the restoration of trust in schools (p. 93) along with the a few acknowledgements. The first note to principals is that repairing broken trust is time consuming and expensive. It is a process in which both the principal and teacher must agree and commit to developing. Repairing broken trust is a two-way process between the violator and victim. The only way that a leader can restore trustworthiness is through consistency of behavior, integrity, sharing control, and communication. It is important to note that the principals in the study felt a personal responsibility to ensure relationships were restored.

Gaps in the Literature & Principal Preparation Programs

The literature provides an overview of trust definitions, the need for trust relationships and increased social interactions between principals and teachers. While the characteristics of a trust relationship are identified, there is still a need for defining the process of how the principal should actually gain the acumen and efficacy to impact the trust relationship between faculty and principal. The literature is relevant to the work that principals and teachers are responsible for doing in schools, however, the literature does not address how the development of trust can be captured in principal development programs nor how district bureaucracy, while well intentioned, can create a barrier for the principal seeking to gain trust at the campus level. Both are existing gaps for topics involving principal and teacher trust.

Following a review of the literature, it seems probable that trust is a significant factor in the relationship between the principal and faculty. With an established trust relationship, principals are able to push and motivate teachers to higher levels of proficiency, thus positively impacting student achievement. An added benefit to such relationships is the impact on school
climate and culture when an individual or group is willing to be vulnerable and dependent upon others based on the consistent behaviors that have been exhibited by the leader.

While few researchers focused on the reach of the trust relationships of the principal, one might argue that if a trust relationship is evident among the principal and faculty then a trust relationship could exist among principal and student body, principal and parents, principal and community members, and principal and school district. While the body of works reviewed do not address these topics at length, there is an opportunity to further explore other ways for leaders to leave a lasting impression on a campus through the expression of benevolence, reliable actions, competent responses and behaviors, honest conversations and feedback, and open dialogue.

Reliability, dependability, predictability, and consistency all contribute to one's trustworthiness (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2004, 2015; Rice, 2015). These leader beliefs will be a focus of my study on principal-teacher trust in high performing schools. Consistency and reliability are associated with actions leading to desired outcomes and are also connected to the trustworthiness teachers associate with the principal. One additional consideration that the literature does not account for is where and when trust relationships are established. The literature base acknowledges that trust in schools is the byproduct of social interactions with teachers. It also acknowledges that such social interactions occur at the campus level. However, the literature does not address where the exchanges occur. The literature does not offer any conclusions regarding the social interactions that occur in private one-to-one settings versus the ones that occur in hallways, classrooms, professional development meetings, duty posts, cafeterias, sporting events, or at parent meetings.

There is also a need for future research to address the existing gaps in literature on principal-teacher trust in an educational setting. A need exists for a set of competencies
related to trust, and should be explored, defined, and role played through future research to determine their impact on effective school reform and student academic achievement.

Principal-teacher trust is important to the teaching and learning process and the overall operation of schools. The principal has the charge of planning for social interactions and establishing trust in a school. The literature emphasizes the impact high principal-teacher trust has on teacher performance and student academic achievement. The literature highlights the fact that most high performing schools have principals with high levels of trust with teachers. Therefore, it is important to understand the perspectives of principals on the importance of principal-teacher trust in high performing schools. The central research question to be explored is in the research study is: **What are the most significant leader beliefs and leader-teacher interactions that foster principal-teacher trust in high performing schools?**

**Research Methods**

As a former high school principal who spent six years in a high performing urban magnet school, I found that the role of the principal was made easier with a culture of high principal-teacher trust. I was able to grow each team member because they trusted my actions and belief system. They had been on staff with me long enough to observe that my actions were consistent, my leadership style was open, I was honest about the work that was being done and how the team needed to move forward. The teachers knew to come to me and address their concerns if they ever doubted that I cared about them. As a result of the trusting and mostly positive teacher-leader interactions, engaging with the faculty in this manner quickly became the norm in the culture of the school. I had consistently high expectations of everyone and challenged each individual within the organization to be their best for themselves and for the students. It was in this season at my former school that the team was able to create new course sequences and develop a robust Humanities program.
This very challenging work would not have been possible in the absence of a strong principal-teacher trust relationship.

Research Study

The aim of this research study was to respond to the central research question which is: *What are the most significant leader beliefs and leader-teacher interactions that foster principal-teacher trust in high performing schools?* It is important to note that all schooling had been moved to a virtual platform due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This research study was conducted through the qualitative tradition of a case study, and the research took place in a virtual setting. The target audience was six teachers, an assistant principal, and a principal with less than five years at a high performing middle school magnet campus that is located in a large urban school district. All interviews were held in a virtual setting.

Participant Selection

I virtually interviewed eight campus-based individuals to capture their views on the behaviors and interactions that foster trust between a principal and teachers. I interviewed the principal, assistant principal, and teachers in three categories: less than five years of experience, 6-10 years of experience, and 11+ years of experience in education. The stratification of teacher experience was important to the research study because the literature supports that developing trust takes time. I was interested in finding out the perspectives of each interviewee as it related to the behaviors and interactions that foster trust between a principal and teachers. I also sought to determine the amount of time it took for each individual to determine if the principal was trustworthy.

Research Site

A high-performing magnet middle school serving grades 6-8 served as the site for the virtual research study. The school is located in an urban school district that is comprised of over
For the purposes of this study, the urban district has approximately 40 high schools, 30 middle schools, 150 elementary schools, and 10 multi-level schools. Approximately 30 of the schools in the district are magnet schools. The school has maintained a highly rigorous science curriculum that sets it apart from other STEM academies within the district. At the time of the research study, the school was staffed with one principal, one assistant principal, a counselor, five support staff and 25 teachers. Four teachers at the school had over 20 years of experience, 10 teachers had 11 – 20 years, six teachers had 6- 10 years, and five teachers had 1- 5 years. The campus had 457 students, 86% were Economically Disadvantaged and 77% were labeled talented and gifted. Students were required to meet the 40th percentile, or on grade level status, on a norm referenced test to be admitted into the school.

The school was selected for the case study because of the consistently high campus climate survey responses over the past three years in the area of teacher-principal trust. The data captured in Table 1 focuses on the seven statements that participants were asked to respond to that pertained to teacher-principal trust at the campus, which included the following:

- The principal has confidence in the expertise of the teachers.
- I trust the principal at his or her word.
- It’s ok in this school to discuss feelings, worries, and frustrations with the principal.
- The principal takes a personal interest in the professional development of the faculty.
- The principal looks out for the personal welfare of the faculty members.
- The principal places the needs of children ahead of personal and political interests.
The principal is an effective manager who makes the school run smoothly. The data were aggregated by school district for the fall and spring semesters of each school year in which the surveys were administered. Then the percent positive data was captured for each survey item for the campus, the overall magnet campus feeder schools, the magnet middle school feeder pattern, and the district. 

See Table 1. All faculty and staff members were encouraged to take the climate survey. On average, twenty – five teachers from the school participated in the climate survey over the last three years.

Table 1. School Data on Principal-Teacher Trust from Research Site

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher-Principal Trust Survey Items (Campus percent positive for fall and spring)</th>
<th>District Spring 2019</th>
<th>MS Feeder Pattern Spring 2019</th>
<th>Magnet Campus Feeder Pattern 2019</th>
<th>Spring 2019</th>
<th>Fall 2018</th>
<th>Spring 2018</th>
<th>Fall 2017</th>
<th>Spring 2017</th>
<th>Fall 2016</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overall Principal Teacher Trust</td>
<td>72.2</td>
<td>81.2</td>
<td>81.2</td>
<td>95.2</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>99.5</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>76.4</td>
<td>74.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The principal has confidence in the expertise of the teachers.</td>
<td>75.0</td>
<td>84.9</td>
<td>84.9</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>80.8</td>
<td>72.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I trust the principal at his or her word.</td>
<td>71.3</td>
<td>78.6</td>
<td>78.6</td>
<td>90.5</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>80.8</td>
<td>80.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It’s OK in this school to discuss feelings, worries, and frustrations with the principal.</td>
<td>68.7</td>
<td>77.4</td>
<td>77.4</td>
<td>85.7</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>96.2</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>61.5</td>
<td>72.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The principal takes a personal interest in the professional development of teachers.</td>
<td>73.6</td>
<td>83.9</td>
<td>83.9</td>
<td>95.2</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>80.8</td>
<td>76.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The principal looks out for the personal welfare of the faculty members.</td>
<td>72.2</td>
<td>81.8</td>
<td>81.8</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>76.9</td>
<td>72.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The principal places the needs of children ahead of personal and political interests.</td>
<td>75.6</td>
<td>82.3</td>
<td>82.3</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>80.8</td>
<td>80.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The principal at this school is an effective manager who makes the school run smoothly</td>
<td>69.1</td>
<td>79.5</td>
<td>79.5</td>
<td>95.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>73.1</td>
<td>68.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The participants were notified via email of the purpose of the research and the researcher’s role in the research study and data collection process. Participants were made aware of the confidentiality of responses throughout the research process and signed an electronic consent form to indicate a willingness to participate in the research study on principal-teacher trust. Participants were asked to respond to thirteen survey questions in a virtual interview with the researcher. I recorded and transcribed responses to each question for each participant. Following the interview, I engaged in the member checking process with participants to gain additional feedback on the questions that were previously asked during the interview.

The research study was analyzed and interpreted through a social constructivist framework, which allowed the researcher to look for theories and patterns of meaning based on the responses received from each interviewee. I used broad, open-ended questions to gain an understanding of a) evidence of principal beliefs about the behaviors that foster principal-teacher trust. I also recorded b) evidence of principal and teacher interactions that foster principal-teacher trust, and c) evidence of the impact of principal-teacher trust on the school climate. Using an ontological approach allowed me to identify themes that answered the central research question about behaviors that foster principal-teacher trust in high performing schools.

I used a similar approach to that of Hoppey and McLeskey (2013) to introduce the qualitative tradition of case study. I collected data through the ethnographic method of interviews with an ontological lens to focus on the many experiences of the interviewees and their beliefs about the interactions with others. I also conducted a study of the campus climate survey for the past three years for evidence of trust behaviors. The case study was appropriate for the design of the study because the framing allowed the opportunity for one
phenomenological interview during the first month as well as for optional informal dialogical interviews throughout the following four weeks where needed.

The research design provided me an opportunity to study the trends presented in each participant’s feedback on leader beliefs and leader actions that foster principal-teacher trust and the campus climate survey over a period of time to capture the viewpoints of the principal, assistant principal, and teachers on why and how specific trust interactions are fostered (p. 247248). The principal, assistant principal and teachers were selected for the study based upon three factors: a) ability and interest in participating in the study, b) understanding that the principal, assistant principal, and teachers would be a rich source of knowledge for understanding principal-teacher trust (Hoppey & McLeskey, 2013), and c) the principal’s years of experience in K-12 education and at the current school (p. 246).

Data Collection

The data collection process allowed for one focused and in-depth phenomenological interview to be held for each participant. Participants were asked thirteen open-ended questions (see Table 2. Principal – Teacher Trust Questionnaire) during the phenomenological interviews to gain insight on the principal, assistant principal and teachers’ experiences and each interview built upon the previous one. Each interview focused on determining the types of activities in which the principal engages on a daily basis. Focused informal dialogical interviews followed each dialogical interview to determine the “actions, attitude, beliefs, and understandings about specific events of the school day (p. 248)” from the various perspectives of the principal, assistant principal, and teachers. It was important to capture the leader’s beliefs about trust and the leader trust actions and behaviors that fostered trust relationships at the campus. Questions were refined as the interviews progressed to address specific scenarios and to better understand
why and how the principal, assistant principal, and teachers believed the trust interactions were fostered and nurtured.

**Data Analysis**

The researcher utilized a similar data analysis process to the one used by Hoppey and McLenskey (2013) which included using formal interviews that were audiotaped and then transcribed, reviewed, and analyzed (p. 248). The researcher’s reflections and analyses were captured in a five-step process that allowed for coding of the data and categorization to identify interview data. A third-party qualitative data analysis software, NVIVO, was employed to aid in the coding and categorization phases of the research analysis process.

The data analysis process involved five steps. The first step was to develop a coding system to analyze all data and all coding directly related to the research question. Next, the data analysis process began by reading through all interview transcripts. Then, the transcripts were coded in three ways: descriptive, topic, and analytical codes. Each code was linked to another code to aid in defining the trust-building beliefs or actions of the principal, assistant principal, and teachers (Reed & Swaminathan, 2016). Then the researcher focused on coding settings, ways of participating, relationships, and meanings that lead to specific themes or patterns (p.1107). Lastly, trends were identified and included in the leader beliefs and leader-teacher interactions that were found to impact the continuum of principal teacher trust in highperforming schools.

**Data Validity**

The researcher shared positionality to the subjects in the study and discussed the existing relationship between the researcher, principal, assistant principal and teachers. The researcher was tasked with working alongside the principal, assistant principal and key leaders for one four week term. It was believed by the researcher that the findings would indicate that frequent
contact, honest dialogue, and meaningful interactions with school personnel will lead to a level of trust that allows teachers, the assistant principal and the principal to share success and challenges in developing principal-teacher trust within the school.

Similar to the data validity approach utilized by Reed and Swaminathan (2016), the researcher used three sources of data for triangulation or crystallization: virtual interviews, peer debriefing, and climate survey findings. The researcher used peer debriefing as a “constructive means of validation and credibility” with the employed third-party researcher for the purposes of maintaining a broader perspective due to one person being close to the campus and the other residing elsewhere.

Research Findings

In the findings, I will articulate what the interviewees believed that trust looked like and the kinds of interactions that fostered principal-teacher trust at the school. Based on each interviewees’ response, it is important to note how a leader’s actions can aid in the establishment of the trust bond or result in the deterioration of it. Another key area to understanding the trust relationship that exists between teachers and a principal are the specific situations that create positive or negative variance in the trust bond.

Implications of Conducting Research during COVID-19 Pandemic

COVID-19 has presented the world with some very unprecedented challenges. The effect that the pandemic has had on the global population and economy has been daunting to say the least. No one expected for healthcare workers to be placed on the front lines in the midst of the outbreak, serving tirelessly to keep people alive and safe. Citizens sat back and witnessed the outbreaks take precedence in faraway lands like China and Italy. It was unfathomable to believe that such a crisis could overtake the United States. Unfortunately, the people of the United
States have been learning how to live in a modified state of quarantine in an effort to stay well. Most people are focused on finding a vaccine that will stop the spread of the virus and allow the country to move beyond the restrictions of the pandemic. People are constantly seeking the comforts of their former lives while simultaneously having to learn and establish new ways of living that will never quite resemble the former way.

If one’s focus is shifted from the healthcare field to the current state of the U.S. education system, one would note that there are similar levels of disruption taking place daily. It is difficult for educators to believe that the conventional approach to teaching students in a brick and mortar setting has been completely dismantled. The shift to a virtual setting has come with an urgent demand for equity in assignments, resources, food, and technology. The demand has also intensified the need for school leaders to show up for their teams in a humanistic manner. The realization of not returning back to school had all sorts of implications for school leaders. This time of crisis emphasized the need for trust in the leader-teacher tasks that were required during the shift from face to face instruction to online learning. The pandemic challenged the strength of the leader-teacher trust bond. If trust was present, then it aided in the completion of the workload. Where trust was absent between the leader and the teachers, then productivity was likely to be impeded. The presence of a trust relationship between the leader and teachers made the work happen more cohesively and allowed for the leader to respond to the campus needs and challenges that had been presented.

The first and most important necessity for campus leaders was being able to develop an effective communications plan for all stakeholders and trusting them to adhere to the messages that were being conveyed. There were so many tiers of communication that had to be disseminated each day and I thought that my school district had used all communications mediums well. Messages were being shared to all stakeholders on email, Facebook, Twitter, the
district website, callouts, and on individual school sites. For a moment, it appeared that
information was being released every hour. The frequency of the updates was important and
ensured that stakeholders knew what was going on. School leaders were charged with managing
personal angst and questions while working alongside teacher teams to ensure that school ran as
smoothly and as efficiently as possible. As many school leaders set out to create as normal of a
situation as they could, they began to identify new opportunities to innovate and trust the
expertise of teachers who had excelled at using a variety of instructional platforms. Campus
leaders were forced to establish trust relationships out of necessity and for survival.

Every school leader was subjected to an adaptive change scenario that was unplanned,
unexpected, and had to be addressed. The need for leader-teacher trust was paramount. The job
was too extreme for the leader to handle alone and to ensure that students’ needs were addressed.
This time called for trust between the leader and the teachers. The onset of the COVID-19
pandemic created a sense of urgency and panic as leaders worked long hours to respond to the
needs of stakeholders. Additionally, school leaders were forced to acknowledge the deficits that
existed at the campus from a lack of technological resources to a lack of proficiency in using
digital platforms and applications. Principals found themselves relying on a very unique group
of technology savvy teachers who became leaders because of their knowledge.

The pandemic challenged school leaders to partner with teachers in the work of holding
the team together. Leaders were no longer able to isolate themselves from the needs of the
faculty. Instead, principals were forced to address the unknown circumstances that were
presented each day. The principals were required to lead differently and more intentionally. The
pandemic helped leaders to see the humanistic side of the job and challenged leaders to take care
of the people within their organizations. Principals began to conduct socio-emotional learning
sessions for adults and daily check-ins to gauge the mental and social health of their teams.
COVID-19 required school leaders to strategically plan out ways to hold the team accountable to the work and each other. The leader had to quickly establish trust as a means of holding the team together.

**Participants**

I interviewed the eight professionals for this study including the principal, assistant principal, and teachers in three categories: less than five years of experience, 6-10 years of experience, and 11+ years of experience in education. The literature emphasizes the fact that establishing trust in a school setting takes time. I am interested in finding out from the participants which behaviors and interactions foster trust between a principal and teachers. I also wanted to know if time had an impact on trust being earned.

**Evidence of Leader Beliefs, Actions, and Behaviors**

The questions that were asked in each interview could be categorized into two categories. The first category of questions addressed the teachers’ thoughts on their leader’s beliefs about trust. The second category of questions addressed the leader actions and behaviors that allowed for the teachers to experience the five facets of trust firsthand: *competence, honesty, openness, reliability, and benevolence*. Several of the teachers responded to both categories of questions with clear, logical statements. However, to fully understand the value that the trust brings to the principal-teacher relationship, it is important to note the instances where the teachers told stories and gave specific examples of situations where the teacher-leader interactions fostered a trust bond with the principal.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leader Beliefs about Trust</th>
<th>Leader Trust Actions and Behaviors</th>
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<tbody>
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</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Broughton Leader Beliefs, Actions, and Behaviors Trust Questionnaire
Each interviewee’s response was initially coded as a node in NVIVO as trust actions or behaviors, beliefs about trust, or impact of trust. Coding responses in this manner allowed for the researcher to identify the category where each respondent placed their values. Ninety-one responses were categorized as trust actions or behaviors, 42 responses were coded as beliefs about trust, and 22 responses were categorized as impact of trust. Next, each respondent’s feedback was coded for the five facets of trust – benevolence, openness, honesty, competence, and reliability. Thirty-nine entries were coded as benevolent, 24 entries addressed openness, 16 entries addressed honesty, 15 entries focused on competence, and 13 entries addressed reliability.
What is interesting to note is that reflective, while not identified as one of the five facets, was presented in the data seven times.

Working in a space with high levels of trust has a direct impact on the quality of the relationships between the leader and the teachers. When a high trust relationship is established, teachers are more apt respond to the leader regardless of what is being asked of them. High trust relationships allow for collaboration and feedback to occur in an authentic and consistent manner between all parties. Teachers are empowered to problem-solve, experiment with new techniques, and innovate beyond the status quo.

High trust gives room for bidirectional respect where the leader is given space to demonstrate competence in managing the school and implementing strong systems to yield improvements in student achievement. At the same time, the teachers are given the opportunity to work and grow as content experts and advisers to the principal. This kind of professional mutual respect mitigates feelings of distrust, isolation and vulnerability between the leader and the teachers. In turn, the safety and professional well-being of both parties is placed at the forefront to provide a frame for how the team will work together to accomplish school improvement goals.

**Portrait of the Principal**

The principal is an African-American female who has been a campus administrator for seven years and has served as an educator for 22 years in elementary and middle school. While this was her first year as the principal at the middle school, the leader’s first principal assignment was at an elementary campus. It was during her tenure at the elementary school that she learned how to lead a school with dignity and care. She learned to see her faculty for who they were as individuals and professionals and remained accountable to the growth and development team.
She learned to be a listening leader. She believed that it was in her best interest to learn about the school while getting to know the teachers. The leader welcomed the opportunity to listen and learn. The principal acknowledged that she is an introvert and she believed that others on her staff were like her and appreciated her ability to hear them and reflect on the messages that were being conveyed.

**Principal Relationship Building**

The data showed that the principal was more focused on the relationships with her team as opposed to the many tasks that had to be completed. She never devalued the work that had to be done, she nurtured her people and they, in turn, helped her to get the work done. She was intentional about her interactions with each teacher at the start of the school day and throughout the day. She prioritized her ability to balance her workload with her connections with others. This approach to leadership made her accessible to her team and allowed for her to be highly visible throughout the school.

The overarching themes of empathy and concern for others were prevalent throughout the data. The leader was perceptive and sensitive to the needs of others.

*Leader: Sometimes I'll send out a Remind text message and say, "Hey, text back if you need more time completing [a task]," or "Text back if today's not a good observation day for you."

Urban school leaders do not often have the opportunity to leverage the softer side of the work. The job often calls for the leader to be a fixer, and most of their time is dedicated to moving the instructional needle and improving student achievement outcomes. In those scenarios, trust building and relationship development are often deprioritized for the sake of a more firm and direct approach that will yield quick shifts in academic performance. There are many different kinds of leader actions and behaviors, and this leader appeared to exhibit a few of
the ones that impacted her ability to establish strong trust bonds. She embodied a set of behaviors and actions that allowed her to connect with her team around the work while also valuing them as humans. I believe that those behaviors made her stand out as an urban school leader.

In this section, I will discuss how a core set of leader behaviors and actions showed up in the leader’s daily interactions with the teachers. Additionally, I will discuss how having a core set of leader behaviors and actions make it easier for the leader to establish a trust bond with teachers in a variety of circumstances. I will first discuss how the leader fostered trust with the faculty. Then I will address how the pre-existence of trust impacted the ability of the leader to establish trust with faculty members. In the assessment of the faculty at this high performing middle school, it was important for me to consider the connection between the teachers’ years of experience and leader - teacher trust. Some of the interviewees acknowledged the roles that situational trust and positional trust played in the development of a trust bond with the school leader. The respondents asserted that trust requires a relationship between two parties, in this case between the teacher and leader, and the leader must exhibit some key characteristics. The teachers emphasized a list of trust-busting behaviors that eliminate the opportunity for trust to be established. These behaviors were contrasted with the need for the leader to demonstrate benevolence, openness, and reflection to seal the trust bond between the leader and the teachers.

Fostering Trust

In many instances during the data collection process, the data that was presented by each respondent who was surveyed on the role of principal-teacher trust in high-performing schools was captured through a story. It was through the narration of several scenarios that the teachers or administrators added credence to their responses about the five facets of trust. Many of the responses centered on the quality of interactions between the leader and the teachers.
Leader: So, if I'm walking down the hall and they need a bathroom break, I can say, "Hey, I've got your class for 10 minutes. Is there something you want me to do?" I said, just being a people person first and not being so task oriented is important. A lot of days, that was to my demise. My workday didn't start until the people left, but I feel like education is a people business.

Additionally, the respondents discussed how the leader showed up to work, heard the voices of the faculty, observed the situations that are taking place, and responded to the needs of the faculty as individuals and as a collective group.

Pre-Existence of Trust

As I interviewed the teachers, it quickly became evident to me that the campus had a low teacher turnover and mobility rate. The teachers noted that this campus is the only school that many of them had taught at during their tenure. One teacher noted that in his nineteen years at the campus, there had been at least eight principals who had led the campus. Another teacher mentioned that due to the low mobility rate, the teachers had developed a bond over the years in spite of who was leading the school.

In my building, we definitely feel like we can come to each other with anything. If we are having a problem, whether that's something that's happening in our classroom or with other adults, no matter what the problem is, that we can talk honestly and openly both with the same goal in mind of solving the problem.

The teachers noted that the leaders were placed at the campus for a short while and then moved to higher positions within the district. In this case, the faculty remained constant and relationships continued to develop. One important variable to note is that varying degrees of trust bonds had been developed with each administration.

Intersectionality of Teacher Experience and Trust

The teachers placed value on their years of service and commitment to their craft. The faculty proudly identified as a high performing group of teachers who were integral in the success of the school and the high achievement that had resulted over the years. The teachers
were appreciative of the campus leaders who understood their motivation as practitioners. Most of the teachers had achieved high levels of proficiency on district evaluations and were highly credentialed to teach rigorous contents. The teachers had worked hard to become content experts and the school had achieved numerous awards, including a National Blue-Ribbon Schools Award for Exemplary Performance, as a result of their contributions. The teachers were more trusting of the leaders who took interest in them as teachers and as leaders. They had earned autonomy over the years to teach and lead in various capacities. The team desired to have a competent leader who understood the value that they were bringing to the team.

**Situational Trust**

The existence of a trust bond or lack of one could be attributed to the *outdegree*, or quality, of planned daily interactions between the leaders and the teachers. While each of the five facets of trust -- *openness, honesty, reliability, competent, and benevolence* -- are important in developing principal-teacher trust in schools, the data presented an opportunity to discuss the role of benevolence, openness and reflection in a variety of situations. The scenario below addressed one example of benevolence and openness while working with her teachers.

*I think also being able to know their kids by name and their families by name and checking on certain situations, if they're having health issues, helping them brainstorm a situation. If they have a stressful day, they come in my office and dump. They know that there's nothing that they can't say to me. I don't feel like it's disrespectful ever to come in and say I'm tired or I feel stressed.*

It is imperative to note once more that reflection had not been identified as one of the five facets of trust; however, it appeared to have value in the establishment of trust-building relationships at the middle school. The leader frequently alluded to how she would think about what it was like to walk in the teachers’ shoes. Every time that the principal talked about a situation where she was reflective about the impact that COVID-19 was having on her team and their families, she would stop what she was doing to be there for them. She recognized that her ability to reflect on
her season in the classroom helped her to connect with her teachers in their time of need. She used these situations to show them compassion and vulnerability. Her awareness of their needs guided her actions and behaviors in tough situations and helped her to seal the trust bond with her team.

**Positional Trust**

When I considered the role of the principal in school improvement work, I had to also consider the positionality of the leader to the teachers. The principal is the leader of the school and is ultimately responsible for student achievement outcomes, climate, and culture. The principal’s formal role, or position as a leader, has the ability to yield, inform, or demand respect from followers. The manner in which the leader views the position of the teachers may inform the level of trust and respect that is given to the leader by the faculty.

*This is definitely not a sprint. It looks like it could be a marathon or at the minimum, an 800. Anybody who knows about track [knows how to] run an 800 strategically... So, I think giving them that mercy to let them know that right now there's not a wrong way to do this. We're going to do it the best we know how, we're going to collect some data, and we're going to keep refining.*

The teachers discussed the ways in which the principal acknowledged their positionality and expertise for their content and leadership abilities. More specifically, the teachers discussed how the principal articulated a need for high expectations for all children. The work was viewed as a collective effort and in turn, the principal was able to foster a well-crafted space for collective trust. According to a teacher known as Paul for the purposes of the study, the principal allowed for the teachers to share their voices, opinions, provide input and have agency in the decisionmaking process.

*[The principal’s leadership style is] not one of those typical things. She talks [to the teachers] one at a time. She’s not afraid to go stand in front of the whole staff [in the] library...and she asks[for] what needs to be done or what needs to be changed.*
Positionality may not have an immediate effect on the trust bond between the principal and the teachers. However, it appeared that when there was a mutual respect of positions within the school organization, then a collective trust could be fostered. Positional trust is not always given, but instead, has to be earned through the frequency and quality of the social interactions between the leader and the faculty.

**Tactical Leader Actions and Behaviors**

This research study focused on a leader who embodied a core set of actions and behaviors to foster a trust-building relationship with teachers. The establishment of trust with the teachers on her staff allowed her the opportunity to work a strategic plan in the midst of COVID-19 by using tactical leader actions and behaviors. Tactical leader actions and behaviors focus on specific, short-term tasks that aid in accomplishing the goals of a strategic plan. Principals are often challenged to be strategic thinkers and leaders who build schoolwide organizational plans that focus on improving student academic achievement and climate and culture. When leaders adopt a tactical approach, they are challenged to learn their team and match each member to the most appropriate task to accomplish the end goal of improving student achievement and school climate.

**Barriers to Establishing a Trust Bond**

One fallacy that may be associated with the work of a school leader who is attempting to establish trust with the faulty is that the trust is automatically given as a result of the leader’s role or position. Trust is not readily given and must often be earned by each party over time. In this study, I have been addressing the actions and behaviors that allow for school leaders to establish strong, healthy trust bonds. Understandably, where there are trust building behaviors and opportunities, there are also behaviors that deteriorate the trust bond. Those behaviors can be
defined as trust busters, or leader behaviors and disposition that do not foster an environment for social interaction, care, or relationship building. Several trust-busting behaviors were identified by the interviewees, however, three major leader actions and behaviors stood out among the rest. The teachers identified showing favoritism as a primary means of isolating teachers from the leader and from each other. Another trust-busting behavior is not having direct lines of communication and access to the leaders. This creates space for aloofness to present itself. Lastly, the teachers identified a lack of confidentiality as a trust-buster for them.

While talking with the teachers about their beliefs about trust, the teachers mentioned the equal access that they had to the principal as a result of her open-door policy. The teachers stated that they never felt the need to make an appointment or withhold information from her. The leader felt strongly about giving the teachers an open invitation to dialogue with her:

*I also think having an open-door policy to know that whenever they need to talk to me, they can come in. I believe in people first and serving my teachers and my students first. I do the work later. Sometimes that means for long nights and long weekends. I believe that if I take care of my people, then I believe that success will be eminent because when they're taken care of, then the students [are] going to be taken care of as well.*

The teachers also discussed how the leader showed up for them each day and checked on them and the students. They felt like the leader was inclusive in her approach and made everyone an integral part of the team.

Consequently, the teachers discussed how the quality of interactions and relationship building had varied over the years based on the leader. One teacher mentioned that at one time confidentiality between prior leaders and teachers was a concern. Additionally, the teachers mentioned instances of leaders showing favoritism towards some teachers and not others. Lastly, the teachers discussed how they viewed the leaders who challenged or failed to acknowledge
their leadership roles, abilities, or expertise. These concerns were viewed as barriers to the establishment of a trust bond between the leaders and the faculty.

**Exercising Leadership through the Five Facets of Trust**

In this section on leadership, I will discuss how the leader used the five facets of trust to establish trust with her team. Competence, reliability, and honesty, openness and benevolence make up the five facets of trust. I focused on the leadership actions and behaviors that were displayed by the leader towards the teachers.

**Leading with Competence**

The leader exhibited competence in her ability to lead the middle school campus, especially during an unprecedented time. She did not want instruction nor relationships to suffer in her building. She had over twenty years of experience in education and she had continued to engage in her craft as both a practitioner and as a learner. Her team celebrated her for consistently having a plan, for being organized, and for being able to articulate a plan of action effectively. Her team noted that regardless of the tasks that had to be completed when the school shut down in the spring semester, the principal was always a few steps ahead of other district principals. The teachers were awed by the fact that she had already anticipated the need for a communications plan, adult and student socioemotional lessons, and a technology distribution plan prior to schools closing down. The principal was adamant about ensuring that her team and her students were considered and cared for as they navigated virtual schooling.

Throughout the interviews, the teachers discussed the importance of the leader showing up to do the work. In order for a leader to be willing and able to lead in the role of the campus principal, the leader must display efficacy in administrative tasks. Being organized, timely, and efficient was important to the leader at the school. The leader noted that her ability to create
strong strategic plans and implement systems throughout the school made her a more effective leader in a crisis:

... they know that I'm very meticulous with details and logistics, I'm just goal-oriented and I can't function well without systems. And it's hard to form a system in the middle of a pandemic because you don't know it looks like. There [is] no exemplar.

The leader recognized the need for an action plan during the onset of the crisis. To accomplish the plan, she tapped into her administrative skillset to map and shape the campus plan and respond to faculty and student needs. One teacher recalled the principal’s plan as being a proactive one:

So, first of all, the first thing that comes to mind is my principal is very proactive. So knowing that this [crisis] might happen several days before it actually did happen, the balls were set in motion. She met with her leadership team, and then met with the faculty. She got our ideas first, and then met with the faculty, and this is our game plan. Along that same plan, again, being very proactive, weeks before we even know what was happening, how things were changing, she [had] already planted the seed that, ”I want you to be thinking about what will August look like if we are in this same situation.”

The teachers were willing to follow the leader because she had a plan. Her experience in education and her training allowed for her to know how to mobilize her team around the components of the action plan and around a common goal. Based on these actions, the teachers displayed appreciation for the forethought that the leader had given to ensuring a smooth transition from face to face learning to virtual learning.

**Leading with Reliability**

The leader was visible throughout the building during the school day and the teachers could rely on seeing her and connecting with her in an authentic way. Her teachers appreciated how reliable and predictable her daily routines were. Her daily presence in hallways and classrooms allowed for her to engage in frequent touchpoints with her team and helped her to
hear the needs of her teachers. Once she identified a need, she was quick to respond to it to ensure that the teachers were able to be their best for students and for each other.

The school leader may demonstrate a variety of actions and behaviors as a result of the situations that occur in the school. The leader of this campus believed that while it was impossible to make everyone happy, it was possible to respond in a manner that was consistent and predictable. The leader believed that there was a cadence to the day for intentional touchpoints that allowed her to be there for her teachers. She did not establish a personal or professional boundary to her connections. She merely believed that it was her role to be what her team needed for her to be on a consistent basis:

I think it's during the tough times that it is important to know that my leader can be a leader. She can be a mentor, a shoulder to cry on. She can be someone I can vent to. She can be someone to give me tough love. She can be someone to correct me in love. She can be someone to be a thought partner. I just think the many different faces and sides help build trust because it helps people know that I can be almost whatever they need me to be in the struggle.

This approach to leadership is one that sits in stark contrast to a leader who must serve as the driver in most situations. Based on my interview with the principal, the reliable leader was one who is present, available, and able to meet the teachers where they are regardless of the circumstance.

**Leading with Honesty**

Honest leadership allowed for the teachers to take the principal at her word. She made a habit of listening to the needs, wants, and demands of her teachers to respond in the most appropriate manner. At times, the school received directives from central office and the leader had to explain the rationale for why the work needed to be done, even when it did not connect to the campus vision, mission and goals. She pointed out that some decisions were not open for
discussion and the team needed to comply with the request. While her team was not always in agreement with the district office’s decisions, she was honest with them when directives were given. She took the time to acknowledge their thoughts and feelings, and she clearly articulated her expectations for completing the work in an excellent manner.

As a result of the trust bonds that had been established between the principal and the teachers, the teachers were able to give the leader accolades and thank her for leading them during a crisis. They affectionately called her a warrior and offered words of gratitude towards her for her selfless acts of leadership. Additionally, the teachers noted that under the principal’s leadership they were able to sit together in the library and address issues as they arose. One teacher noted:

_On our campus we come together quickly. We don’t let things escalate and get out of hand before dealing with them. And I guess being honest, so when we have those faculty meetings or PLCs, just being honest upfront helps the teachers to manage in times of stress and turmoil._

It is the leader who has to first demonstrate a willingness to tackle problems head on and display honesty and transparency during the process of finding a resolution. The principal’s ability to model honest leadership and respectful dialogue for her team, even during disagreeable times, created a safe space for them to engage with one another in the same way in her absence.

**Leading with Openness**

Openness was also reflected in the leader’s actions and behaviors. She was highly transparent with her faculty about the decisions that needed to be made, about roles and responsibilities during the pandemic, about changes from upper management, and about her feedback on instruction from her observations in the classroom. She had an open-door policy that made her team feel welcomed and demonstrated her availability to hear them. As the principal began to invite the teachers into her professional space on a more frequent basis, the teachers
began to feel more comfortable with her and they began to open up to her both personally and professionally. This kind of openness helped the leader to establish and maintain a trust bond with her teachers.

*Openness* is one’s willingness to share information, control, and leadership capacity. The leader prided herself on being as transparent as possible regardless of the circumstance. She shared her struggles with her teachers and remained vulnerable with them about the things that went well and openly shared when things completely flopped. She attempted to show them her human characteristics as a leader to emphasize the fact that leaders do not always have the answers. The leader’s ability to be vulnerable made her faculty more willing to work alongside one another to resolve issues. During the interview, the leader discussed how the feedback sessions occurred:

*Like I said, because none of us have been through a pandemic before [and] none of us have been forced to move a campus to a virtual setting, we had to have a lot of feedback sessions. We had to do a lot of planning. We had to think through some things. Some were collaborative. Some things were direct and [they] just had to do it.*

The leader and teachers had bought into a notion of staying ahead of the learning curve, which meant that they all had to meet frequently to share and think together. Creating space for this kind of groupthink and relationship building can become a best practice for school leaders for fostering trust. However, there may be a need for formal or informal protocols for how the team will meet and dialogue to handle situations.

**Leading with Benevolence**

At the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the leader provided strong systems for implementation while remaining benevolent and kind throughout a season of extreme change at the school. *Benevolence* is the act of caring about the well-being of others and understanding what it is like to walk in another person’s shoes and the leader made a daily practice of caring for
her team:

So sometimes [the] teachers would feel like if I ask the principal to make copies for me, she'd think I'm unprepared. [They have had the] chance to realize that I'm not that person because I've had those mornings where maybe I've switched on the way to work and said, "I want to work on fractions today instead of this. I don't have what I need. I just need somebody to run and do this for me." I get it.

The leader was intentional about her touchpoints with her faculty and did not lose sight of what it meant to support her team in the midst of an organizational change. She cared about her team and recognized the value that needed to be placed on the people first before the work:

I'm connecting with teachers personally, and it's not always during the school day. Sometimes it's texting at night. "Hey, you look like you had a rough day today. Is there anything I can do?" Them reaching out to me sometimes with something that may be totally unrelated to school. That we have a trust bond, whether it be something they want me to share or maybe something they want me to pray for them about or pray with them about.

The leader took an interest in keeping the lines of communication open with teachers throughout the school day and beyond the workday. She believed that being there for them and responding to them for professional and personal matters was integral to her role at the school. The leader’s beliefs about the frequency and immediacy of the communication with the teachers demonstrated the value that she placed on relationship building:

I think one of the primary interactions is just building personal relationships. One of the first things I did when I first got to [the campus] is, I had five-minute interviews with everyone who wanted one and I just wanted to get to know some of them personally and professionally or whatever they felt comfortable sharing. Then based on that, I started building relationships.

The leader’s empathy for the teachers helped them to see her as being human. A teacher, whose name has been changed to Jane for the study, felt that she could relate to her leader because she witnessed her working while wearing different hats. The leader could be seen doing morning walks, visiting each teachers’ class to say good morning, and checking on teachers to see what
they needed from her to have a good day. She observed her leader as a principal and also as a mother:

I think if nothing else, I had a lot of sympathy for her knowing that she's a parent herself. She's getting pulled in a million different directions, trying to keep her house in order and meetings and information and things that just seem to be changing by the day. So, I didn't really have a shift in trust at all as far as moving to online learning.

Another teacher, known as John for the study, knew that the principal was a parent and that she was in the midst of adjusting to online learning with her own child. The teacher was overwhelmed with balancing the dual roles of being a teacher and the parent of an at-home learner during the COVID-19 pandemic. The teacher felt the need to inform the principal of the struggle:

She has a young child. She's like, "I know exactly how you feel. It's so hard." Then she started sending, "Hey, what would you think if we reworked the schedule to where you met with all your classes in the morning? Then you could know that you're going to be on camera in the morning, and then you have the afternoon to set that schedule [for your child]." So, it was great for me to send that email because I basically felt like I was telling my boss, right now, this week. I can't do what you expect me to do because I'm just so overwhelmed.

Benevolent leadership allowed for the leader to walk in the shoes of her teachers. This form of leadership allowed for her to demonstrate acts of caring and empathy towards her teachers.

Emergent Theme: Reflection as an Undervalued and Unexplored Aspect of a Trust Relationship

In addition to the five facets of trust, I focused on reflection as a part of the role of the school leader. It is important to note that reflection is not one of the five facets of trust, however it evolved as a recurring theme throughout the study. The leader mentioned throughout the interview how she used reflection to drive her actions towards her teachers. She remembered what it was like to be a teacher at certain points in the school year when their energy levels were
running low. She used her ability to reflect on how they might be feeling. She used reflection to define the moments when she needed to check on them and connect with them. The leader had a keen awareness about what it meant to take care of her faculty and it was her hope that the teachers would reciprocate and take care of the students. The leader was thoughtful in how she managed and approached her teachers, which led to the establishment of a connection with each one of them as individuals and as a collective unit.

*Reflective* is one’s ability to consider a current situation and relate it to a familiar occurrence from the past. Connecting to situations in this manner may foster one’s ability to relate to others who are experiencing a similar circumstance. The teachers discussed how important it was for the leader to be human and empathetic during the COVID-19 pandemic and the shift to a virtual learning setting. The teachers appeared to have appreciated the openness that was exhibited by the leader and the leader appeared to benefit from her ability to reflect on what it was like to be a teacher:

> This is too much work. You’ve overwhelmed me. They knew that they could come and say it and I would never take it personally because I always would put myself in a teacher’s lens first. Times when I planned tasks or activities or meetings, I would always think about how I used to feel as a teacher different times of the year.

The responses that focused on the leader’s reflection about benevolence and the well-being of the faculty far outweighed any of the other responses pertaining to the five facets of trust. The leader had an overwhelming number of reflective and empathetic responses in comparison to her faculty:

> So of course, in August, everybody comes back refreshed. Sometimes teachers do a little bit more. I knew around October it was teacher burnout. So, I knew I needed to pull back or maybe do some additional things for morale. I try to always look through that lens as an administrator so that I could empathize with them.
Reflection is not one of the five facets of trust; however, it was a recurring theme in the research study and impacted the leader’s ability to establish a trust bond with teachers.

**Synthesis of Evidence**

One key takeaway from this study on the role of principal—teacher trust in a high performing school is that a greater emphasis was placed on the feedback for trust actions and behaviors than on beliefs about trust. Based on the trust actions feedback, one could infer that the respondents placed a greater value on the trust behaviors and actions between the teachers and the leader.

The study affirmed that the five facets of trust, *competent, reliable, open, honest, and benevolent* in addition to *reflection*, were the common themes that were presented during the virtual interviews. As the respondents answered each question, they alluded to the five facets of trust and reflection with direct and indirect examples. The interviewees gave examples of the specific actions that were consistently exhibited by the principal that strengthened the trust bond. In the midst of such uncertainty, the teachers applauded the leader’s ability to hold information in confidence while exercising strong systems for communication. The teachers noted that the principal always has a plan, does an excellent job of keeping them informed, and advocates for what is best for the school while knowing her own strengths and limitations. It was through her consistent actions that she displayed competence, honesty, openness, reliability, benevolence and reflection. The teachers stated that it was easy to follow the principal’s leadership because she took the time to learn each of them. Knowing the teachers made it possible for her to lead with transparency and to share the workload with them.

**Making Trustworthy Leadership Visible**

The findings in this study demonstrated how one urban school leader managed, supported, cared for, and nurtured trust bonds with her team, especially while in the midst of the
COVID-19 pandemic. The study revealed how the leader placed trust building at the center of her work and lived it out through her interactions with her team each day. The five facets of trust—openness, honesty, reliability, competence and benevolence, in addition to reflection remained at the forefront of the study and throughout the synthesis of evidence on leader actions and behaviors in a high performing middle school setting. Depending upon the value that is placed on each facet by the leader and the teacher, it is possible for several facets of trust to play a role in the establishment of the trust bond. Additionally, it is entirely possible for one facet to present itself more frequently and define the quality of the trust bond between the teacher and the leader. Evidence from this research study on a principal’s perspective on the role of principal teacher trust in a high performing school resulted in the leader and teachers placing an emphasis on the leader knowing how to demonstrate the five facets of trust in the workplace.

There were two distinct types of major findings in this study which encompassed a) a set of guiding leader actions and behaviors that drive the interactions between the leader and teachers at school that I will call principalisms, and b) the tactical leader actions and behaviors that were displayed by the principal to accomplish short term goals while fostering intentional interactions in an effort of bring the team together around a common goal. While the principalisms and tactical leader behaviors are distinct, they are interrelated. It is the principal who is the driver of academic excellence and a positive climate at the campus, however, the principal cannot do the job alone. The principal must establish a working relationship with teachers that values them as human beings, allows for frequent input and feedback, and empowers them to be effective instructors in the classroom and climate builders beyond the classroom.

Principalisms address how a principal chooses to interact with teachers in a manner that either fosters or diminishes trust by being open, honest, reliable, competent, benevolent or
reflective. In contrast, *tactical leader actions and behaviors* address how the leader leverages the trust bond, or lack thereof, to respond to the interpersonal and task-oriented situations that occur with teachers. *Tactical leader actions and behaviors* are often situational and can be leveraged as needed by the leader for the purposes of getting the work done in a unified manner. *Tactical leader actions and behaviors* were exhibited by the leader throughout the research study. I created *Graphic 2* to articulate the relationship of the *principalisms* to the leader’s ability to establish a trust bond with teachers, employ *tactical leader actions and behaviors* to engage teachers in the work of accomplishing a short-term goal, and to have a positive impact on student achievement and campus climate.
This research study affirmed that principal-teacher trust is essential in schools and when it is present, the leader, teachers, students, and culture of the school are positively impacted. The leader encompassed a core set of behaviors and actions, called *principalisms*, that allowed her to connect with her team on a human level. This specific leader exhibited the *principalisms* or core behaviors and actions in six specific ways:

- The leader walked the talk and was dependable. She made it a habit to show up for her teachers in meaningful ways.
- The leader gave and solicited feedback which demonstrated her ability to hear and see her teachers.
- The leader allowed for vulnerability and was open, caring, and empathetic in the work.
- The leader engaged the team members in frequent touchpoints to demonstrate that she was present and visible in the work.
• The leader valued the contribution of every team member and she expected for everyone to work for the good of the order of the students and the school.

• The leader articulated clear expectations by establishing parameters for the work and how it should be accomplished.

Naming the core leader behaviors and actions, known as principalisms, can be beneficial to a principal in the establishment of trust with teachers. Naming the principalisms will aid the leader in remaining focused on sealing the trust bond. In the study, once the principal had established a trust relationship with her teachers, she was then able to engage them with tactical leader actions and behaviors to respond to campus needs.

**Strategic Response**

This study focused on the role of principal teacher trust in a high performing middle school. The setting for the middle school was in a large, urban school district with multiple organizational layers. The principal had the difficult role of serving as the liaison between the campus and the district, which encompassed a core of upper and senior management positions inclusive of executive directors, assistant superintendents, deputy chiefs, chiefs, and the superintendent of schools. The purpose of this research study was to address the central research question: *What are the most significant leader beliefs and leader-teacher interactions that foster principal-teacher trust in high performing schools?* My initial assumption at the beginning of this study was that there are benefits of trust in schools that impact student achievement and a positive school climate and culture. A secondary assumption was that the leaders who make time for trust building reap the benefits of the trust bond. Lastly, I assumed that trust building has a time and a place in the role of the school leader.

The study revealed a set of six guiding leader actions and behaviors that I called principalisms. These core leader actions and behaviors were evident in the principal teacher
interactions that occurred at the school. The *principalisms* allowed for the school leader to connect with her team on a human level and live out the trust bond in the following ways: a) The leader walked the talk and was dependable. The leader made it a habit to show up for her teachers in meaningful ways. b) The leader gave and solicited feedback which demonstrated her ability to hear and see her teachers. c) The leader allowed for vulnerability and was open, caring, and empathetic in the work. d) The leader engaged the team members in frequent touchpoints to demonstrate that she was present and visible in the work. e) The leader valued the contribution of every team member and expected for everyone to work for the good of the order of the students and the school. f) The leader articulated clear expectations by establishing parameters for the work and how it should be accomplished. Both the leader and teachers benefitted from the trust bond that had been established and the trust relationship shaped how they worked together. The existence of the trust bond gave the leader the option to use *tactical leader actions and behaviors* as needed.

Trust is a compilation of competence, reliability, honesty, openness, benevolence, and reflection. The purpose of this research study was to articulate the need for the five facets of trust (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000) in schools. During the research study, trust actions and behaviors between the leader and teacher remained at the forefront of each dialogue about the role of principal teacher trust in high performing schools. Throughout the research process, it became evident to me that there are specific leader actions and interactions that must take place in a very consistent manner between the principal and the teachers to establish and seal the trust bond. The leader must make it both a norm and a priority to establish a transparent set of beliefs and expectations for how the trust relationship will work. In the literature, Vodicka (2007) refers to Buskens’ *outdegree* as a means of placing a measurement on the quality of the personal
interactions that leaders with team members relative to the quantity of possible connections that one can have if the interactions are meaningful, intentional and consistent.

Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2000) assert that trust is a choice that has the ability to impact a school’s climate and culture. Regardless of whether a teacher, parent, or student chooses to trust a campus principal or not, the decision has an indirect impact on student achievement, on improving students' success, and on students’ ability to build confidence in themselves. The ability of the leader to exercise such forethought will ultimately inform the manner in which the team will work together. The literature serves as a basis for why it is necessary to establish a healthy school climate and climate surveys are often a temperature gauge for how well the school is doing. Positive climate surveys can be indicative of a high trust environment which, in turn, can have a positive effect on student achievement. The outcome of a strong trust bond is a sense of validation and belonging for both the teachers and the leader. Trust adds value to the work relationship and makes for a more positive climate and culture than if trust was not present.

**Emergent Themes**

The data gathered in this research process substantiates a strong need for trust-building leader actions and behaviors. The research affirms that there is a need for the five facets of trust inclusive of openness, honesty, reliability, competence, and benevolence. There is also a need for reflection. The research study revealed that there is a tremendous need for benevolence and empathy in the workplace. At times, it can become difficult for a leader to determine what behaviors should be exhibited if the leader is not hardwired to show such behaviors. Therefore, it is important for district level leaders and principal hiring managers to ensure that trustworthy leadership is made clear and visible for campus leaders.
The research provided insight on the actions and behaviors of the leader and how she showed up for her team members in response to the team’s overall human condition. Benevolence challenged the leader to consider the well-being of each individual while continuing to push and motivate them to achieve excellence. Empathy and reflection, on the other hand, forced the leader to slow down from the busy-ness of the work of the principal long enough to remember what it was like to be a teacher. If a leader is able to reflect in this manner, then the leader could be more likely to relate to the teachers in a more humane way by modeling empathetic behaviors.

School leaders may not know for certain if empathy influences one’s ability to show benevolence or care towards another. However, my findings support that if each teacher feels valued, has a defined role, and believes that they are heard and understood by their leader, then the ground becomes fertile for the development of a trust bond. It is important to note that trust building is an intentional process that provides the leader the space and opportunity to bend and move with the team. The leader who has the ability and acumen to meet teachers in this space has a better chance of impacting the quality of principal teacher interactions, improving campus climate and culture, and growing as a professional and individual. Such growth experiences can lead to a greater sense of connection and trust between the leader and the teachers. Establishing a strong trust bond between the principal and the teachers is one way that principals can improve a campus’ culture and climate.

**Recommendations**

In light of this study about the role of the leader in establishing trust bonds with teachers, there are three recommendations that would create congruence in establishing trust and
improvement across state agencies, school districts and at campuses. Trust-building is a key part of the continuous improvement model that leaders must plan for and execute well over time. The relationship building is just as important to the work of the urban school leader as the tasks themselves and needs to be addressed at the state, district and campus levels.

**Recommendation I: Revise State Level Competencies**

The state education agency has oversight of the preparation and certification of principals. Based on the findings in this research study, there is a need for the agency to develop a focus on trust-building competencies. Every principal preparation program adheres to a set of competencies that align with state leadership goals and expectations. The work of the school leader is rooted in actions and behaviors that will improve student achievement. One southwestern state has a set of state principal preparation competencies that focus on five key standards: *Instructional Leadership, Human Capital, Executive Leadership, School Culture, and Strategic Operations.* The standards on *Executive Leadership* and *School Culture* allow for the most organic focus on trust-building behaviors. *Executive Leadership* addresses how the principal will model a focus on improving student achievement. Three of the four sub-indicators of this standard that address resiliency and change management, commitment to ongoing learning and communication and interpersonal skills. The language of the standard assumes the leader will have the opportunity to learn about the *principalisms*, such as situational trust, positional trust, or benevolent leadership, that were discussed in the research findings. However, the standard does not articulate a need for the leader to establish trust with stakeholders.

Similarly, the standard that addresses *school culture* focuses on areas such as establishing a shared vision for high achievement, intentional family and community involvement, and establishing a culture of high expectations. The standard fails to focus on the leader becoming open, honest, transparent, competent or benevolent in the work. This standard, like that of
executive leadership, assumes that leaders know how to establish trust bonds with stakeholders within the school community. Unfortunately, the standardized language does not account for the actions or behaviors that leaders must develop to foster relationships in the first place. Therefore, a unique opportunity exists to develop a set of competencies that challenge the leader during the preparation program to reflect upon their strengths with the intent to develop a balance of task-oriented skills and soft skills. Skills that enable principals to lead with their heads and hearts will transfer from the leader to the teacher and throughout the school community, regardless of the circumstances. While the leadership standards for the southwestern state do not place value on trust development, trust-building is an inherent and unspoken expectation of the principal. Competencies that address trust in school communities, especially between the leader and the teachers, should be added as a part of the principal preparation program.

**Recommendation II: District Level**

It is important for districts of all sizes to reconceptualize trust in schools and focus on a few key adjustments that aid in trust establishment at the campus level. Attention should be focused on requiring leaders to develop a 30-day trust plan, articulating a clear principal onboarding plan, incorporating field observations into district new leader training for all new school leaders, providing new school leaders with a veteran mentor, and providing time for professional growth activities such as role-playing scenarios with master principals. Additionally, it is important for district level leaders to coach campus leaders to operationalize the trust building actions and behaviors in the work. Lastly, it is important for organizations to evaluate the extreme stress that is caused by an extraordinary event.

**30-Day Trust Plan**

To impact the quality of trust in schools, districts must require a strategic 30-day trust plan for campus leaders. District level coaching and support must be present to reinforce the need
for leader reflection and identifying their own *principalisms* based on the five facets of trust. District level leadership should also be charged with ensuring that campus plans are well-developed, articulated, operationalized, and supported. This kind of targeted plan would increase a campus leader’s ability to establish trust bonds with faculty members, students, parents and community members. However, I would suggest that every leader needs an ongoing 30-day trust-building plan with a timeline for growing the trust bond within the school and its community. Trust building behaviors are those that challenge the leader to establish task oriented and people-oriented interactions.

The work of a school leader cannot be done in isolation and requires the collective efforts of all stakeholders to achieve school improvement efforts. Therefore, the school leader should develop a plan that addresses how stakeholders will be invited to be a partner in the work. In attempting to establish effective principal-teacher trust bonds, the leader will need to first establish a plan for interactions. These interactions should be more frequent than weekly staff meetings, however, the connections should not inhibit the teachers from completing daily duties as assigned. The research focused on a leader who was proud of the fact that she greeted each of her teachers every morning and that she made rounds to classrooms each day. She was highly visible within her building and maintained frequent touchpoints with her team to allow for them to discuss personal and professional information with her.

The leader was successful in developing and maintaining the trust bond that had been established because she was intentional about her plan. She ensured that she was available to address the needs of her teachers and that she maintained an open-door policy. It is imperative that the leader maps out a 30-day trust plan to identify ways to nurture the established relationships as they are being established. Trust bonds are much like a sealant that gets stronger over time, and principal-teacher relationships are no different. The development of a trust plan
can help a new campus leader balance the tasks that must be done while focusing on the people who will help do the work.

Leaders should consider five checkpoints in the development of the 30-Day Trust Plan. First, leaders must seek the truth in the data on existing school community relationships between stakeholders. It is important for leaders and teachers to gather data and reflect on it to inform the truth. Next leaders and teachers must reflect on the data to gain an understanding or find root causes for why relationships are going well or are nonexistent. Then the team should gather to share ideas, draft a plan, and poke holes in it until the team agrees on the final actions for the 30-Day Trust Plan. Lastly, the team should identify key touchpoints for developing stakeholder trust, calendar out dates for interactions and publish the finished plan.

Graphic. 4. Checklist for 30-Day Trust Plan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>30-Day Trust Plan Checklist</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>○ <strong>Truth</strong>: Seek the truth with data in hand.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>○ <strong>Reflect</strong>: Consider what is working well with stakeholders and what is not working effectively</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>○ <strong>Understanding</strong>: Use the data reflection to drill to the root causes of positive and negative trust relationships within the school community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>○ <strong>Share Findings</strong>: Collectively gather with faculty to share ideas, establish responsible parties, timelines for communication, and draft a 30-Day Trust Plan and poke holes in it. Then work together to finalize the 30-Day Trust Plan.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>○ <strong>Touchpoints</strong>: Identify key opportunities to connect with stakeholders. Calendar out events and publish the finished plan.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Principal Onboarding**

While the transition process may appear to be simple in nature and a common practice among district leaders, without a clearly articulated plan, the process may lack specificity, quality, depth, and lead to variance in implementation. The implications for a shift in practice are great and will impact the district’s ability to efficiently fill vacancies for the upcoming school year. A focus on hiring and staffing is important because the leader can learn a lot about the roles that people play in the organization and how the human resources have been leveraged to impact campus success (Bolman & Deal, 2013).

Additionally, the new leader can learn about the formal and informal political power structures that exist both at the campus and within the school community. Knowing this information from the start will help the leader to foster interactions that establish trust and make important decisions later in the year. It is equally important for the new leader to listen and solicit feedback from stakeholders. Listening in this way could help the leader learn the school’s narrative, traditions, symbols and rituals. Bolman and Deal (2013) spend a significant amount of time discussing the artistry of leadership and decision-making. The transition plan and Bolman and Deal’s frames allow the leader to become acclimated to the new school in a way that enables him or her to reframe the organization as needed and to make informed decisions.

**Professional Development through Field Experience and Observations**

Targeted in-district professional development through field experiences should be at the core of every school leader’s work. Additionally, emerging and aspiring leaders must have the opportunity to learn alongside master principals. These leaders must be trained in trust-building behaviors and the positive impact that high teacher-leader trust has in high performing schools. It is important for new school leaders to spend time observing master principals in action. They
must be able to capture the behaviors and interactions that enable or inhibit the leader’s ability to establish trust with faculty members. Such an experience could also provide a safe space for new leaders to ask questions about trust-building and how to capitalize on opportunities to establish trust bonds throughout the school community.

**Mentoring & Role - Playing**

New principals must be assigned a mentor who has had success in establishing high trust at the campus level. These leaders are often identified as master principals or executive principals. Often, leaders learn best from other leaders who have been successful in similar schools while doing similar work. When a new principal has the opportunity to observe and reflect on the way that a master principal leads, then the leader will have a model or exemplar from which to develop their own approach. Master principals have the ability to provide context to novice principals and a rationale for why specific decisions are made through the various organizational frames.

Additionally, master leaders can challenge new leaders to role-play crucial conversations and responses to challenging scenarios. A master principal can articulate how to engage faculty members in important conversations without destroying the principal – teacher relationship. Many times, leaders create barriers to establishing trust with teachers because of how an issue was addressed or articulated. While school leaders cannot prepare to address every trust-based scenario that may surface, practicing through role-playing may aid the leader in making challenging conversations easier to moderate and relationships easier to maintain.

**Extraordinary Contingencies: Events that test the system**

The systematic disruptions that accompanied the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic challenged all levels of the school organization. The reverberating impact of the pandemic could be likened to that of Hurricane Katrina, Hurricane Harvey, and the tornadoes that have swept
through the southwestern state over the years. In such cases, districts must determine how to mitigate the dissolution of trust by evaluating the current situation that has been created by the crisis. As a result of the district’s evaluation, central administration must also consider revamping the budget to efficiently respond to campus needs in an effort to lessen the burden that is placed on the principal. One consideration would be to identify trust building opportunities following the hiring of a principal with a goal of incorporating trust building activities throughout the principal transition plan.

**Considerations during a crisis**

Amidst the COVID-19 disruptions to normal practices, it is important for the hiring team to systematize the principal transition process to mitigate any disruption to the trust-building process that must occur at the campus. The structural system will guide the hiring managers in ensuring parameters have been established for the success of the new school leader. The collaboration between the central office principal supervisor, the outgoing principal and the incoming principal will be important to the transition. The leaders should pay close attention a few key areas to provide support to the campus principal in fostering trust through hiring and staffing, the master schedule development process, budget development, creating a professional development plan, developing the comprehensive needs assessment, and articulating the campus improvement plan as outlined below:

*Hiring and Staffing.* The outgoing leader would have the opportunity to share the structural frame (Bolman & Deal, 2013) of the organization with the incoming leader. This is the most opportune time evaluate current staff strengths and areas for growth and development. It is also the time to discuss current and anticipated vacancies along with new hire updates. Where possible, the outgoing leader will have the opportunity to connect the new leader with existing faculty and staff, survey the team for input on upcoming hires, and create a guiding
coalition of leaders who will share meaningful perspectives and offer insight. This is one of the most important opportunities for the new leader to identify teachers with similar personality traits and mission for teaching and learning. If the leader is intentional in hiring people who are in alignment with their vision for the school, then the leader will potentially have a greater chance to establish a trust bond based upon a common principle.

*Master Schedule.* The outgoing principal will have the opportunity to share the current master schedule and any drafts of new master schedule. The incoming principal then will have the opportunity to join or establish small group committees to finalize the draft of master schedule and obtain the final approval from the Executive Director. The design of the master schedule is important because it reflects the areas that are important to the leader and address the needs of the school. Teachers often inform the master schedule based on their credentials, levels of student achievement, or due to designated leadership roles. This development of the master schedule allows the opportunity for a new campus leader to have initial and ongoing conversations with content teams and individuals to become acclimated with the skill sets of each faculty member. If a leader takes the time to dialogue with team members around such an important aspect of the school, then both parties will have an opportunity to learn about the other’s expectations, core values, belief systems and contributions to the team.

*Budget.* The outgoing principal will share the status of the current budget and the proposed budget for upcoming school year. The incoming principal will then be responsible for approving any new expenditures and purchases. One way that a new principal might establish trust through budget development and spending would be to talk with the teachers to identify current needs for resources, supplies, and professional development. The leader’s willingness to ask for input from teachers on how money should be allocated to support their work can articulate that the leader is listening and cares about the teachers’ success.
Professional Development Plan. The outgoing principal will share the status of the Professional Development Plan and outline any scheduled trainings for the upcoming school year. Analyzing student achievement data to identify areas of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) is an important exercise for any new principal who is taking on a new school. This kind of analysis could provide the leader with an opportunity to engage campus content teams and leaders in a meaningful dialogue around ways to strengthen instruction and improve teacher pedagogy. This kind of dialogue and data analysis to inform practice could also impact the collaborative development of a Comprehensive Needs Assessment (CNA) and Campus Improvement Plan (CIP). While in most cases the outgoing principal will share the CNA plan and any drafts of the CIP, the incoming principal can leverage this opportunity to get to know the team while reviewing the CNA with established committees. The incoming principal will join or establish a CIP committee, facilitate the final draft development of the CIP, and obtain final approval from the executive director. These are the kinds of collaborative opportunities that naturally impact the work at the campus. Such conversations allow for value to be placed on the vision-casting of the leader and teacher expertise, and both parties are tasked with interacting around a common goal. This study on the role of principal-teacher trust in high performing schools has proven that trust-building is more prevalent and more likely to occur when teams spend time together in the work.

Recommendation III: Campus Level Leadership Matrix

The work of the principal is best done in concert with others who share the vision and mission of the school. Principals have the ability to influence and control campus culture, climate, staff retention, school safety protocols, and most importantly the quality of instruction. The principal must be diligent in soliciting the contributions of key stakeholders to ensure
excellence throughout the organization. Such engagement, if permitted, can extend far beyond
the role and reach of the principal.

**Leadership Matrix: Everyone Works Here**

Establishing an expectation for every member of the organization to sign up as a leader in
a key area of service to the campus is one way of validating the teachers on what they do well.
The *Teacher Leadership Teams Matrix*, (Broughton & McDonald, 2015) is one way that leaders
can choose where they spend their time adding value to the school community (*see* Table 3.
*Teacher Leadership Matrix*). Each teacher is tasked to give of themselves to make the school the
best that it can be. What I found after using the *Teacher Leadership Teams Matrix* for several
years was that teachers began to take ownership of their committees and felt free to make
recommendations and upgrades as needed. Every committee on the matrix represented what the
leadership team and teachers had agreed on and determined to be important.

The research study affirmed that when trust is present, a school leader can be demanding
in the work. With a trust relationship, the establishment of clear expectations, giving frequent
feedback and communicating in a consistent manner become normalized activities. Such tools
and routines for communication add value to the work of the classroom teacher, and ultimately
aid the leader and teachers in building the school climate and culture and improving student
achievement.

**Table 3. Sample Teacher Leadership Teams Matrix**
### Sample Teacher Leadership Teams Matrix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leadership in Culture</th>
<th>Leadership in Student Academic Achievement</th>
<th>Leadership in Quality Instruction</th>
<th>Leadership in College and Career Readiness</th>
<th>Leadership in Mentorship and Support</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PBIS Champions:</td>
<td>RTI:</td>
<td>New Teacher Support:</td>
<td>SBM Planning Team:</td>
<td>Student Mentoring:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Culture:</td>
<td>Attendance For Credit:</td>
<td>Instructional Excellence Academy:</td>
<td>SBDM:</td>
<td>Community Service:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student/Parent/Community Engagement:</td>
<td>TPSP/PBL/Capstones:</td>
<td>Principal Executive Leadership Team:</td>
<td>College and Career Readiness:</td>
<td>Communications:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Events &amp; Logistics:</td>
<td>Testing Support:</td>
<td>Internal Marketing:</td>
<td>Recruitment Services:</td>
<td>Corporate/Community Partnerships:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Safety and Security:</td>
<td>Progress Monitoring:</td>
<td>External Marketing:</td>
<td>College Partnerships:</td>
<td>Student Accountability Portal:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Ensure Transparency in Leader and Teacher Communication**

At the campus level, while the principal cannot control the influx of communication that is shared across mediums throughout the school day, the leader can and should be intentional about addressing the important bits of information. The leader should also foster a safe space where teachers can ask questions or make inquiries. The interactions between the leader and the teacher should remain open, transparent in nature, and bidirectional. It is also important for the leader to articulate how they wish to be engaged. This may be an articulation of when to call, text, email, or show up in the main office. The small, and sometimes insignificant and interactions between the leader and the teachers throughout the school day can establish or reinforce a trust bond that will ultimately become invaluable over time.

**Make Time**

I have yet to meet a campus leader who is not busy and laden with a multitude of tasks that must be accomplished in the workday. Many leaders find themselves working endless hours
and feeling as though there is never enough time to socialize or interact with people on their own terms. I caution these leaders to take a step back and consider the value of relationships to the work that must be accomplished in schools. It behooves the leader to make time early on and invest in the people who will have to assist in getting the work done. Calendaring can be a means of controlling the frequency and length of leader-teacher interactions. This research study proves that leaders should view the leader teacher interactions as investments. The more time that the leader spends investing, collaborating, learning and conversing with teachers, then it will become easier for both parties to trust one another as time goes by. The time is worth the investment and far outweighs the interactions between the leader and teacher who do not have a trust bond.

**Financial Impact**

The recommendations in this strategic plan for addressing trust at the state, local and campus levels do not have fiscal implications if a school district has adequate personnel in place for the support and development of the mentoring and field study program. It is imperative for district administrative leaders to provide mentoring and field experiences to all campus leaders, while paying close attention to new and novice principals. An emphasis should be placed on incorporating trust into campus entry plans and into the onboarding process. In the case of establishing trust, the cost factor is not connected to money. The value that is placed on the need for trust relationships in schools is paid through focused programming and allotted time for the implementation and evaluation of this initiative.

**Communications Plan**

It is important to manage the message, the network of support and the practice of trust building at the state, local, and campus levels. As a district leader, my role in challenging the current language of the Principal Preparation Competencies to explicitly define trust as a key factor in culture building would be to present this recommendation to my district superintendent.
The intent would be to leverage his positionality with the state administrators’ association and target his relationship with the State Board of Education representatives to convey a need for leader preparation on trust building in schools. As an executive director in my district, I will influence the communications plan for the Mentoring and Field Experience Program along with the 30- Day Trust Plan and the Teacher Leadership Matrix (see Graphic 5. Communications Plan). The primary forms of communication that will be used include email, the district newsletter known as the HUB, the Weekly Administrative Information Packet also known as the WAIP, district-wide principal meeting announcements, and virtual invitations to mentor and mentee roundtable meetings.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Timeline</th>
<th>Tasks</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Communications Mediums</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Graphic 5. Communications Plan
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Task Description</th>
<th>Goal</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>March 2022</td>
<td>Collaborate with General Superintendent leverage his position with the state administrators’ association and relationship with the district State Board of Education representative to recommend a revision to the Principal Preparation Competency: Culture Builder – 4.A.i.III to include Trust in the language</td>
<td>Manage the Message</td>
<td>Email requesting a meeting with district Superintendent and Chief of Human Capital Management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Meeting with state administrators’ association board to present recommendation, evidence, and impact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Letter to SBOE representative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 2022</td>
<td>Prepare Revisions to LEAD Programming to include assigned mentors and field experience calendar</td>
<td>Manage and Support Programming</td>
<td>Email Director of LEAD to discuss updates; Submit Revised Board Documents via protocol</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 2022</td>
<td>Board Meeting to approve Revised LEAD Programming</td>
<td>Manage and Support Programming</td>
<td>Board Meeting Agenda Intra-district Email The HUB newsletter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 2022</td>
<td>Communicate 30 Day Trust Plan Development Window</td>
<td>Manage the Message</td>
<td>Weekly Administrative Information Packet (WAIP) Announce at District Principal Meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 2022</td>
<td>Implementation of Needs Assessment for 30-Day Trust Plan</td>
<td>Manage Practice</td>
<td>Weekly Administrative Information Packet (WAIP) Announce at District Principal Meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July - August 2022</td>
<td>Assign District Leadership Mentors to New to District &amp; Novice Principals</td>
<td>Manage Network &amp; Practice</td>
<td>Email Invitation to match leaders Zoom: Roundtable Discussion, Assignments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July - August 2023</td>
<td>Development of Trust Plans &amp; Leader Matrix</td>
<td>Manage Practice</td>
<td>Weekly Administrative Information Packet (WAIP) Announce at District Principal Meeting</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Ongoing Implementation and Monitoring Plan

It is important for leaders to monitor the strategic plan for meaningful implementation, new discoveries, and for purposeful outcomes. The strategic plan to foster trust development involves five key actions including:

- Collaborate with the general superintendent to leverage connection with the state administrators’ association and relationship with the district State Board of Education representative to recommend a revision to the Principal Preparation Competency: Culture Builder – 4.A.i.III to include Trust in the language
- Seeking District Board of Trustees Approval for Revisions to LEAD Programming to include assigned mentors and field experience calendar
- Implementing a Needs Assessment for 30-Day Trust Plan
- Assigning District Leadership Mentors to New to District & Novice Principals
- Developing Trust Plans & Leader Matrices

The timeline for monitoring each tenet of the strategic plan to address trust building will take place from March of 2022 and extend to June of 2023, with midyear auditing checkpoints in October 2022, December 2022, and March 2023 (see Table 4. Implementation and Monitoring Plan).

March-May. This timeframe has been allocated to allow time for collaboration with the General Superintendent of Schools for my district, key state administrators’ association members, and State Board of Education representatives on the need for a revision of Competency 4.A.i.III of the Principal Preparation Competencies to explicitly include trust building. If approved, then I anticipate that the Principal Preparation survey will be revised to include leaders’ perspectives on trust. The survey could potentially serve as a medium for monitoring statewide leader actions and behaviors that foster trust.
**June.** June 2023 will mark the end of the fiscal year and the last Board of Trustees meeting for the 2022-2023 school year. That will be the meeting where the budget is approved for the upcoming school year. I will be seeking revisions to the LEAD program to add mentoring and field observations to the department’s scope of responsibilities. Should additional positions be needed, this would be the meeting where the positions would be approved. As of right now, there is no fiscal impact to the budget and there is not a need to add additional allocations. **July-August.** Thirty-Day Trust Plan Needs Assessments and the 30-Day Trust Plan Development will take place in this window along with the development of the Teacher Leadership Matrix. Additionally, mentor principals will be matched with new and novice principals for professional development and field experiences.

**Table 4. Implementation and Monitoring Plan**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Timeline for Action</th>
<th>Focus</th>
<th>Fiscal Impact</th>
<th>Focus</th>
<th>Audit</th>
<th>Responsible Party</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>March 2022-May 2023</td>
<td>State</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Collaborate with General Superintendent leverage his position with the state administrators’ association and relationship with the district State Board of Education representative to recommend a revision to the Principal Preparation Competency: Culture Builder – 4.A.i.III to include Trust in the language</td>
<td>Monitor via Principal Preparation Survey</td>
<td>Self District SBOE/SBEC Commissioner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Location</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Event Description</td>
<td>Scheduling</td>
<td>Responsible Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 2022</td>
<td>District Board</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>District Board Approval for Revisions to LEAD Programming to include assigned mentors and field experience calendar</td>
<td>Board Updates December 2022 June 2023</td>
<td>School Leadership Chief/Deputy Chief</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Approval</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July –</td>
<td>District &amp;</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Implementation of Needs Assessment for 30-Day Trust Plan</td>
<td>October 2022 Stakeholder Surveys</td>
<td>School Leadership Eds and Principals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August</td>
<td>Campus</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2022</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 2022</td>
<td>District</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Assign District Leadership Mentors to New to District &amp; Novice Principals</td>
<td>Board Updates December 2022 June 2023</td>
<td>LEAD Team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July –</td>
<td>Campus</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Development of Trust Plans &amp; Leader Matrix</td>
<td>December 2022 March 2023</td>
<td>Campus Principal Teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2022</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Gaps in the Literature and Future Research**

The disposition of the school leader was not mentioned in the review of the literature or in the data collection process of the research study. Leaders come in many different forms and the leader disposition is characterized in a multitude of ways. One consideration for future research is to identify the disposition of the urban school leader who has been charged with transforming a school and its community. That topic has not been adequately addressed in the literature concerns the work of the urban transformational school leader. The trust bond take time to build and plays a major role in transforming schools. I wonder if the urban transformational school leader could benefit from a shift in direct leader disposition to focus a
more relational stance. Focusing on leader disposition and the balance of one’s dominant leadership style with another more relational style could benefit leader preparation.

Conclusion

Trust is a necessary part of schools, and more importantly, it is an integral part of the work that principals and teachers must do together. Ultimately, trust is the glue that holds schools together (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2000). With trust, schools are able to ensure that students achieve at high levels in a healthy learning environment. It is worth the investment of time and energy from the school leader to establish high levels of trust and to nurture the trust bonds with teachers. There is no better time for school leaders to work on establishing trust norms, behaviors, interactions, and networks for people-building.

Bryk and Schneider (2002) note that good relationships and trust will not compensate for bad instruction, poorly trained teachers or unworkable school structures. Additionally, the blood, sweat, tears, and time given to reform efforts are bound to fail if school leaders ignore the importance of quality interactions on an ongoing basis. The success of the school and the people within it hinge upon the relationships that have been established and nurtured for the long haul.

When such relationships exist, everyone wins.

References


Brown, S., Gray, D., McHardy, J., Taylor, K. Employee Trust and Workplace Performance.


## Table 1. School Data on Principal-Teacher Trust from Research Site

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher-Principal Trust Survey Items (Campus percent positive for fall and spring)</th>
<th>District Spring 2019</th>
<th>MS Feeder Pattern Spring 2019</th>
<th>Magnet Campus Feeder Pattern 2019</th>
<th>Spring 2019</th>
<th>Fall 2018</th>
<th>Spring 2018</th>
<th>Fall 2017</th>
<th>Spring 2017</th>
<th>Fall 2016</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overall Principal Teacher Trust</td>
<td>72.2</td>
<td>81.2</td>
<td>81.2</td>
<td>95.2</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>99.5</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>76.4</td>
<td>74.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The principal has confidence in the expertise of the teachers.</td>
<td>75.0</td>
<td>84.9</td>
<td>84.9</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>80.8</td>
<td>72.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I trust the principal at his or her word.</td>
<td>71.3</td>
<td>78.6</td>
<td>78.6</td>
<td>90.5</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>80.8</td>
<td>80.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It’s OK in this school to discuss feelings, worries, and frustrations with the principal.</td>
<td>68.7</td>
<td>77.4</td>
<td>77.4</td>
<td>85.7</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>96.2</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>61.5</td>
<td>72.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The principal takes a personal interest in the professional development of teachers.</td>
<td>73.6</td>
<td>83.9</td>
<td>83.9</td>
<td>95.2</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>80.8</td>
<td>76.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The principal looks out for the personal welfare of the faculty members.</td>
<td>72.2</td>
<td>81.8</td>
<td>81.8</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>76.9</td>
<td>72.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The principal places the needs of children ahead of personal and political interests.</td>
<td>75.6</td>
<td>82.3</td>
<td>82.3</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>80.8</td>
<td>80.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The principal at this school is an effective manager who makes the school run smoothly</td>
<td>69.1</td>
<td>79.5</td>
<td>79.5</td>
<td>95.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>73.1</td>
<td>68.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix B

Graphic 1. Relationship between Principalisms and Student Achievement
Appendix C

Table 2. Broughton Leader Beliefs, Actions, and Behaviors Trust Questionnaire

A Principal’s Perspectives on the Role of Principal-Teacher Trust in High Performing Schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time of Interview:</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Date:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Place:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewer:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewee:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Position of Interviewee:</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Project description

The aim of this research study is to respond to the central research question and determine the most significant leader beliefs and leader-teacher interactions that foster principal-teacher trust in high performing schools. This research study will be conducted through the qualitative tradition of a case study. The research will take place at a high performing middle school magnet campus in a large urban school district with a principal who has less than five years at the school. It is important to note that due to all schooling being moved online due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this research study will be conducted in a virtual setting.

General Questions

1. Define what trust means to you.
2. Based upon your definition of trust, describe what trust looks like between adults in your building.
3. What kinds of interactions do you believe foster principal-teacher trust?
4. In what ways do you believe that principal-teacher trust impacts the school climate?
5. Based on your experience, what actions or behaviors would lead to a change in the quality of principal - teacher trust?
6. Based on your experience at the school, what do principal-teacher trust behaviors look like when times are challenging and difficult?
7. Which situations create the most opportunity for a display of principal-teacher trust?
8. Which situations create the most variance in principal-teacher trust?
9. How has principal-teacher trust been impacted at your school in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic?
10. To whom should I talk to find out more about principal-teacher trust in your building?

**Teachers Only Questions**

11. Based on your experience, does your current or previous principal behave in a manner that fosters principal-teacher trust? Please explain.
12. What evidence or examples do you have of the principal’s behaviors that foster principal-teacher trust?
13. In light of the COVID-19 mandate to move schooling to a virtual platform, how has the role of principal-teacher trust impacted your ability to adjust to online teaching and learning?
Appendix D

Graphic 2. *Nvivo* Coding references to trust actions and behaviors, beliefs about trust, and the five facets of trust in interviews
Appendix E

Table 3. Sample Teacher Leadership Teams Matrix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample Teacher Leadership Teams Matrix</th>
<th>Leadership in Culture</th>
<th>Leadership in Student Academic Achievement</th>
<th>Leadership in Quality Instruction</th>
<th>Leadership in College and Career Readiness</th>
<th>Leadership in Mentorship and Support</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PBIS Champions:</td>
<td>RTI:</td>
<td>New Teacher Support:</td>
<td>SBM Planning Team:</td>
<td>Student Mentoring:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Culture:</td>
<td>Attendance For Credit:</td>
<td>Instructional Excellence Academy:</td>
<td>SBDM:</td>
<td>Community Service:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student/Parent/Community Engagement:</td>
<td>TPS/PBL/Capstones:</td>
<td>Principal Executive Leadership Team:</td>
<td>College and Career Readiness:</td>
<td>Communications:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Events &amp; Logistics:</td>
<td>Testing Support:</td>
<td>Internal Marketing:</td>
<td>Recruitment Services:</td>
<td>Corporate/Community Partnerships:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Safety and Security:</td>
<td>Progress Monitoring:</td>
<td>External Marketing:</td>
<td>College Partnerships:</td>
<td>Student Accountability Portal:</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Appendix F
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Timeline for Action</th>
<th>Focus</th>
<th>Fiscal Impact</th>
<th>Focus</th>
<th>Audit</th>
<th>Responsible Party</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>March 2022-May 2023</td>
<td>State</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Collaborate with General Superintendent to leverage his position with the state administrators’ association and relationship with the district State Board of Education representative to recommend a revision to the Principal Preparation Competency: Culture Builder – 4.A.I.III to include Trust in the language</td>
<td>Monitor via Principal Preparation Survey</td>
<td>Self District SBOE/SBEC Commissioner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 2022</td>
<td>District School Board Approval</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>District Board Approval for Revisions to LEAD Programming to include assigned mentors and field experience calendar</td>
<td>Board Updates December 2022 June 2023</td>
<td>School Leadership Chief/Deputy Chief</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July – August 2022</td>
<td>District &amp; Campus</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Implementation of Needs Assessment for 30-Day Trust Plan</td>
<td>October 2022 Stakeholder Surveys</td>
<td>School Leadership Eds and Principals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 2022</td>
<td>District</td>
<td>None if district personnel are in place to support program.</td>
<td>Assign District Leadership Mentors to New to District &amp; Novice Principals</td>
<td>Board Updates December 2022 June 2023 Principal Feedback Testimonials Recommended Upgrades</td>
<td>LEAD Team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July - August 2022</td>
<td>Campus</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Development of Trust Plans &amp; Leader Matrix</td>
<td>December 2022 March 2023</td>
<td>Campus Principal Teachers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix G

Graphic. 4. Checklist for 30-Day Trust Plan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>30-Day Trust Plan Checklist</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>o <strong>Truth:</strong> Seek the truth with data in hand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o <strong>Reflect:</strong> Consider what is working well with stakeholders and what is not working effectively</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o <strong>Understanding:</strong> Use the data reflection to drill to the root causes of positive and negative trust relationships within the school community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o <strong>Share Findings:</strong> Collectively gather with faculty to share ideas, establish responsible parties, timelines for communication, and draft a 30-Day Trust Plan and poke holes in it. Then work together to finalize the 30-Day Trust Plan.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o <strong>Touchpoints:</strong> Identify key opportunities to connect with stakeholders. Calendar out events and publish the finished plan.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Appendix H

### Graphic 5. Communications Plan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Timeline</th>
<th>Tasks</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Communications Mediums</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>March 2022</strong></td>
<td>Collaborate with General Superintendent to leverage his position with the state administrators’ association and relationship with the district State Board of Education representative to recommend a revision to the Principal Preparation Competency: Culture Builder – 4.A.i.iii to include Trust in the language</td>
<td>Goal: Manage the Message</td>
<td>Email requesting a meeting with district Superintendent and Chief of Human Capital Management Meeting with state administrators’ association board to present recommendation, evidence, and impact Letter to SBOE representative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>March 2022</strong></td>
<td>Prepare Revisions to LEAD Programming to include assigned mentors and field experience calendar</td>
<td>Goal: Manage and Support Programming</td>
<td>Email Director of LEAD to discuss updates; Submit Revised Board Documents via protocol</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>April 2022</strong></td>
<td>Board Meeting to approve Revised LEAD Programming</td>
<td>Goal: Manage and Support Programming</td>
<td>Board Meeting Agenda Intra-district Email The HUB newsletter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>March 2022</strong></td>
<td>Communicate 30 Day Trust Plan Development Window</td>
<td>Goal: Manage the Message</td>
<td>Weekly Administrative Information Packet (WAIP) Announce at District Principal Meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>July 2022</strong></td>
<td>Implementation of Needs Assessment for 30-Day Trust Plan</td>
<td>Goal: Manage Practice</td>
<td>Weekly Administrative Information Packet (WAIP) Announce at District Principal Meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>July - August 2022</strong></td>
<td>Assign District Leadership Mentors to New to District &amp; Novice Principals</td>
<td>Goal: Manage Network &amp; Practice</td>
<td>Email Invitation to match leaders Zoom: Roundtable Discussion, Assignments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>July - August 2023</strong></td>
<td>Development of Trust Plans &amp; Leader Matrix</td>
<td>Goal: Manage Practice</td>
<td>Weekly Administrative Information Packet (WAIP) Announce at District Principal Meeting</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>