

Exploring administrator perspectives on designing and implementing support and growth plans
for underperforming teachers

by

Claudia Berenice Jacobo Martinez

B.S., Texas Woman's University, 2008
M.Ed., Texas Wesleyan University, 2016

AN ABSTRACT OF A DISSERTATION

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

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Manhattan, Kansas

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Abstract

This interpretive qualitative study explored school administrators' perspectives on designing and implementing support and growth plans for underperforming teachers. Grounded in social constructivism and informed by Vygotsky's concepts of the Zone of Proximal Development and the More Knowledgeable Other, the study examined how administrators structure interventions, navigate challenges, and monitor teacher development within accountability-driven systems. The problem addressed was the inconsistent and unclear processes for identifying and supporting underperforming teachers, which may negatively affect instructional quality and student outcomes. Ten campus-level administrators from a large urban district in the southern United States participated in semi-structured interviews, and anonymized support plan documents were analyzed to triangulate findings. Thematic analysis revealed that effective support plans are characterized by clear standards alignment, structured coaching and modeling, ongoing monitoring, and measurable goals. Administrators also described persistent tensions related to time constraints, documentation demands, policy compliance, and teacher resistance. Teacher mindset emerged as a critical factor influencing implementation and outcomes. Findings suggest that support plans function simultaneously as developmental scaffolds and accountability mechanisms. When aligned with relational trust and sustained coaching, they promote instructional growth; when misaligned, they risk becoming procedural exercises with limited impact.

Keywords: instructional leadership; underperforming teachers; teacher support plans; administrator perspectives; social constructivism; Zone of Proximal Development; teacher development; qualitative research

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Dedication

In loving memory of my mother, whose resilience, courage, and steadfast faith in the power of education shaped my life. Her love, sacrifices, and belief in me are woven into every page of this work.

This achievement stands as a reflection of her enduring legacy.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Effective schooling relies on the seamless collaboration of multiple stakeholders, with school administrators serving as the pivotal force that aligns teacher performance, student achievement, and the overall health of the learning environment. Education involves various roles, each contributing to a child's learning and development. Teachers serve as guides, imparting knowledge and fostering critical thinking, while parents provide support and encouragement at home, reinforcing learning beyond the classroom (Aravena, 2023; Range et al., 2012). School administrators create structured environments that promote academic success, ensuring that resources and policies support student growth (Aravena, 2023). Counselors play a vital role in addressing emotional and social challenges, helping children navigate personal and academic struggles (Yildiz, 2021). Additionally, peers influence learning through collaboration and social interactions, shaping communication and teamwork skills (Yildiz, 2021). Each of these roles collectively impacts a child's academic achievement, personal growth, and overall well-being, highlighting the importance of a strong support system in education.

School administrators play a crucial role in shaping the overall environment and effectiveness of a school (Koli Plaku & Leka, 2025; Poulou et al., 2023). They set the vision and protocols that guide teachers and students, ensuring that educational goals are met while maintaining a safe and supportive learning atmosphere (Lochmiller et al., 2024). By managing resources, implementing curriculum standards, and supporting professional development, administrators directly influence teacher performance and job satisfaction (Yariv & Kass, 2019). Their leadership also affects student success by fostering a culture of academic achievement, discipline, and inclusivity (Lochmiller et al., 2024). Through decision-making and problem-solving, they address challenges such as funding, staffing, and students' academic and socio-

emotional needs, making them essential to the smooth operation and continuous improvement of a school community.

This interpretive qualitative study focused on school administrators' perspectives on designing and implementing support and growth plans for underperforming teachers, while also recognizing that administrators' efforts to advance teacher development ultimately influence student learning outcomes. School administrators have a vital role in education and ensuring student success (Aravena, 2023). They provide leadership, foster a positive school culture, and support teachers in delivering high-quality instruction (Ing, 2010; Menuet, 2005). By setting clear expectations, implementing effective policies, and addressing challenges such as student behavior, resource allocation, and teacher development, administrators help create an environment where both students and educators can thrive (Aravena, 2023; Ing, 2010; Range et al., 2012). Their ability to identify and support underperforming teachers, foster collaboration, and advocate for student needs directly impacts academic achievement and overall school performance (Aravena, 2023). In essence, strong school leadership is essential for driving positive outcomes and ensuring success for all students.

Background

From the perspective of teachers and students, the goal of education is to foster intellectual growth, personal development, and lifelong learning. Teachers strive to inspire curiosity, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills, helping students build a strong foundation for their future (Biesta, 2015). They aim to create engaging, inclusive learning environments that cater to different needs and learning styles, ensuring that each student reaches their full potential (Korth et al., 2009). For students, education is a pathway to knowledge, personal achievement, and future opportunities (Saadat & Sultana, 2024). They seek to develop skills that will help

them succeed in their careers, build confidence, and understand the world around them (Saadat & Sultana, 2024). While teachers focus on guiding and shaping young minds, students take an active role in their learning journey, making education a collaborative process that prepares them for life beyond the classroom.

Though there is a general agreement that education is important in society, people have different perspectives on what the goal of education is. For example, from the perspective of parents and administrators, the goals of education extend beyond academics to include personal development, social responsibility, and future success (Kaya & Erisen, 2024). Parents often prioritize their children's ability to acquire knowledge, develop critical thinking skills, and build strong moral values that prepare them for adulthood (Kaya & Erisen, 2024). They seek an education that nurtures creativity, resilience, and emotional intelligence, ensuring their children can navigate life's challenges (Kobakhidze & Stastny, 2023). Administrators, on the other hand, focus on creating a well-rounded educational system that promotes academic excellence, inclusivity, and lifelong learning (Sahin, 2023). They aim to provide resources, policies, and programs that support student achievement while fostering a safe and engaging learning environment (Aravena, 2023; Sahin, 2023). Together, parents and administrators share the common goal of equipping students with the skills and character necessary to thrive in an ever-evolving world.

The field of education has evolved significantly, and with it, the roles and responsibilities of everyone involved have become more complex and demanding. Today's educators face numerous challenges, including student behavior issues, the pressures of standardized testing, poverty, trauma, lack of parental involvement, and, in some cases, insufficient administrative support (Aravena, 2023; Riehl, 2000; Tutkum & Aksoyalp, 2012). Additionally, some teachers

struggle to meet the increasing demands of their roles, further complicating the educational landscape (Aravena, 2023; Range et al., 2012). Despite these obstacles, the fundamental mission of both teachers and administrators remains unchanged: to ensure the academic success of all students (Aravena, 2023; Javornik & Mirazchiyski, 2023).

For administrators, having proper preparation and skills for developing teachers is of the utmost importance. Research indicates that administrative strategies that help support teachers include induction, mentoring, staffing support, changes in course assignments, enhanced resources and professional development, increased autonomy, constructive evaluations, and assistance with challenging parents (Martinez & McAbee, 2020). One key element for administrator development is through interactions with other professional peers (Jensen, 2023; Sahlin, 2023). With so many different challenges specific to particular schools or districts, efficacious administrative development has increasingly been recognized as an issue best addressed at the site level (Brauckmann et al., 2020). Systematic, formal, and professional learning at all stages of an administrator's career is advantageous for best serving teachers (Bush, 2018; Sahlin, 2023). Best practice administrator development comes through peer interaction, district-specific interventions, and formalized training (Brauckmann et al., 2020; Bush, 2018; Sahlin, 2023). Regardless of the challenges they encounter, educators must adapt, support one another, and implement strategies that foster student growth and achievement, ultimately shaping a brighter future for every learner.

Statement of the Problem

Effective teaching is the most significant factor in student success, making it essential for school administrators to identify and support underperforming teachers (Aravena, 2023; Ing, 2010). When teachers struggle, student achievement is directly impacted, creating gaps in

learning and overall school performance (Aravena, 2023; Ing, 2009; Range et al., 2012). These gaps can widen over time, especially if consistent support and intervention are not provided (Range et al., 2012). It is the responsibility of the administrator to ensure that every classroom provides high-quality instruction that meets the diverse needs of students (Koli Plaku & Leka, 2025; Poulou et al., 2023).

However, not all teachers require the same type or level of support. Some may benefit from targeted professional development focused on specific instructional strategies or curriculum implementation (Rhodes & Beneicke, 2003; Yariv & Kass, 2019). Others may need ongoing mentorship from experienced educators who can model best practices and offer guidance (Yariv & Kass, 2019). In certain cases, coaching may be more effective, allowing for reflective conversations and real-time feedback to improve instructional delivery (Range et al., 2012). Additionally, teachers struggling with behavior management may need training in classroom management strategies to create structured and positive learning environments.

For administrators, it is crucial to provide differentiated support tailored to each teacher's unique needs and challenges. This personalized approach not only fosters individual teacher growth but also promotes a culture of continuous improvement across the school (Yariv & Kass, 2019). By investing in teacher development, administrators help build a stronger instructional team, which ultimately leads to better student outcomes and a more successful school community (Aravena, 2023; Ing, 2010). Without a structured approach to identifying and assisting struggling educators, schools risk failing to meet the diverse learning needs of their students.

Significance of the Problem

Education serves as the foundation for personal growth, societal progress, and economic development, equipping individuals with knowledge, skills, and critical thinking abilities

necessary for success. Historically, education was primarily reserved for the elite, focusing on religious teachings, philosophy, and classical studies (Tutkum & Aksoyalp, 2012). Over time, it has evolved into a more inclusive system, expanding to include science, technology, and vocational training, adapting to the needs of an ever-changing world (Collin, 2004). Today, with advancements in digital learning and a greater emphasis on critical thinking and creativity, education continues to transform, preparing individuals not only for careers but also for active participation in society (Collin, 2004; Riehl, 2000; Tutkum & Aksoyalp, 2012).

Schools play a vital role in shaping individuals and society by providing structured education, fostering personal development, and preparing students for the future. They serve as learning environments where students acquire academic knowledge, critical thinking skills, and social values (Aravena, 2023; Range et al., 2012). Beyond academics, schools help develop essential life skills such as communication, teamwork, and problem-solving, which are crucial for success in both personal and professional life (Range et al., 2012). They also promote socialization by encouraging interaction among diverse groups, teaching students respect, cooperation, and cultural awareness (Range et al., 2012). Additionally, schools provide support systems through teachers, counselors, and extracurricular activities, ensuring students' emotional and social well-being (Aravena, 2023). Schools play a fundamental role in shaping a knowledgeable, capable, and socially responsible generation by equipping young minds with the tools needed for lifelong learning and civic responsibility.

Teachers are essential to education and are the most significant influence on a student's success (Aravena, 2023). A skilled and dedicated teacher can inspire, challenge, and support students, helping them achieve their full potential despite external circumstances (Aravena, 2023; Menuet, 2005). Effective teaching not only improves academic performance but also

nurtures critical thinking, confidence, and a lifelong love of learning (Menuey, 2005; Range et al. 2012). As a result, educators become the cornerstone of a successful education system (Aravena, 2023; Menuey, 2005; Range et al., 2012). Therefore, school administrators play a crucial role in identifying and supporting underperforming teachers to ensure the highest quality education for students (Aravena, 2023; Range et al., 2012). Their leadership directly impacts student achievement by fostering a culture of continuous improvement and professional growth (Aravena, 2023; Koli Plaku & Leka, 2025; Range et al., 2012). By actively assessing teacher performance through observations, student outcomes, and feedback, administrators can pinpoint areas needing support and provide targeted interventions such as mentoring, coaching, and professional development (Aravena, 2023; Ing, 2010; Range et al., 2012).

Rather than viewing low performance as a fixed trait, effective administrators see it as an opportunity for growth and work collaboratively with teachers to enhance their instructional practices (Ing, 2010; Range et al., 2012). When administrators foster a positive culture that includes an encouraging and productive atmosphere, it enhances staff satisfaction. Conversely, when a negative culture is facilitated, it often leads to disengagement, conflict, fragmentation, and diminished job satisfaction (Koli Plaku & Leka, 2025). By prioritizing support and development, administrators not only strengthen individual educators but also improve overall school performance, creating a more effective and engaging learning environment for students.

School administrators play a crucial role in the school system by providing leadership, ensuring a safe and supportive learning environment, and managing the day-to-day operations (Ing, 2010). They support teachers, students, and families by setting high expectations, implementing policies, and coordinating resources to meet the academic and social needs of all students (Range et al., 2012). Their guidance helps create a positive school culture where

learning can thrive. Ultimately, by understanding how school administrators identify, support, and develop underperforming teachers, this study highlights the transformative potential of strategic leadership in fostering teacher growth, enhancing school culture, and driving lasting improvements in student achievement.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore administrator perspectives on the design and implementation of support and growth plans for underperforming teachers, with particular attention to the challenges, tensions, and opportunities for teacher development. As instructional leaders, administrators play a vital role in shaping teacher effectiveness, and their perspectives offer valuable insight into the practical realities of supporting educators who struggle to meet performance expectations (Aravena, 2023; Stringer & Hourani, 2016). This study aimed to explore not only how support plans are implemented but also how administrators balance accountability with encouragement, manage time and resources constraints, and build trust with teachers throughout the processes.

By delving into the administrator's experience, the study sought to uncover effective strategies that lead to meaningful teacher improvement, as well as common barriers that may hinder progress such as resistance to feedback, lack of tailored professional development, or systemic limitations within the school or district. It also explored the emotional and professional tensions administrators face when addressing underperformance, especially in maintaining morale, fostering a culture of growth, and ensuring equity for all students.

The goal was for the findings to contribute to a deeper understanding of how well-designed, targeted interventions can enhance teacher performance and create a more supportive, results-driven educational environment. By identifying what works and what does not from an

administrator's point of view, this study aimed to inform future leadership practices and policy decisions that strengthen teacher development, improve instructional quality, and support student achievement across the school system.

Research Questions

As instructional leaders, administrators are tasked with not only identifying areas where teachers need support but also designing and facilitating meaningful interventions that promote professional growth and improve classroom performance. This study aimed to provide a deeper understanding of the decision-making processes behind these support plans by capturing the lived experiences, reflections, and insights of those in leadership roles. The study focused on uncovering the key elements administrators consider essential when creating effective support plans. This included identifying instructional weaknesses, determining appropriate interventions (such as coaching, mentorship, or targeted professional development), and establishing clear goals and timelines for progress. In addition, the study sought to explore the strategies administrators use to monitor growth and provide ongoing feedback while maintaining a supportive and constructive relationship with the teacher. By doing so, the research shed light on the practical and theoretical components that shape the structure and implementation of support plans in real school settings.

Furthermore, the study recognized that developing and implementing these plans is not without its challenges and tensions. Administrators often face resistance from teachers, time constraints, limited resources, and the emotional weight of navigating sensitive conversations. These factors can complicate the process and impact the overall effectiveness of the support plan. Through this research, the goal was to capture how administrators manage these tensions while still striving to maintain a focus on student achievement and instructional improvement.

The research was guided by the following questions:

1. What do administrators describe as important features or components of support plans for underperforming teachers?
2. What are the challenges and tensions administrators experience when developing and implementing teacher support plans?
3. How do school administrators execute and monitor teacher support plans to promote teacher growth and improved instructional practices?

By addressing these questions, the study aimed to contribute valuable insights into leadership practices that support teacher development and, ultimately, enhance student learning outcomes. The findings also informed professional learning for school leaders and provide practical recommendations for strengthening teacher support systems within schools.

By using a qualitative approach, this study allowed administrators to share their experiences and insights in-depth, capturing the complexities and subtleties that are often overlooked in quantitative research (Creswell & Creswell, 2022). This method prioritizes the voices of school leaders, offering a platform for them to reflect on their personal journeys, the decisions they make, and the rationale behind their approaches to supporting underperforming teachers. Through rich, descriptive data gathered from interviews and other qualitative sources, the study aimed to develop a comprehensive understanding of how administrators perceive and enact support plans within their unique school contexts.

This study applied the principles of social constructivism to explore how school administrators develop and implement effective support plans for underperforming teachers. It was grounded in the understanding that knowledge and professional growth are inherently

constructed through social interaction. This framework clearly underscores the importance of collaborative processes between administrators and teachers in driving successful outcomes.

The findings aimed to inform best practices in teacher support and professional development by identifying what works, what challenges persist, and what conditions foster the most meaningful growth. By focusing on the administrator's perspective, this research sought to contribute valuable insights that can enhance instructional effectiveness, strengthen teacher capacity, and improve student outcomes across educational settings.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study was grounded in social constructivism, which asserts that learning is an active and collaborative process shaped by social interactions and cultural contexts (Chuang, 2021). This orientation was particularly well-suited for adult learning in professional settings, where collaboration, contextual understanding, and shared meaning-making are critical for development (Chuang, 2021). Central to this framework are Vygotsky's (1978) foundational concepts, including the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), the More Knowledgeable Other (MKO), social interaction, and scaffolding (Saleem et al., 2021). Learning is understood as a socially mediated process, with knowledge constructed through engagement with others rather than isolation (Chuang, 2021; Saleem et al., 2021). The ZPD is especially relevant for identifying tasks that teachers can perform with support but not yet independently, guiding the design of interventions that promote growth within that developmental range (Saleem et al., 2021; Walqui & van Lier, 2010).

The relationship between administrator leadership actions and teacher development within this socially mediated environment is paramount in this framework (Suryanto et al., 2024). Administrators serve as the MKO by identifying areas for teacher improvement,

providing guidance, and facilitating access to resources and professional development opportunities. Through observation, feedback, and structured support plans, administrators create conditions where teachers can engage in targeted growth activities that fall within their ZPD (Jimerson & Myers, 2024). These are challenging but achievable tasks that require scaffolding to master.

This conceptual framework proposes that effective execution and monitoring of teacher support plans lead to three interconnected outcomes: improved teacher instructional practices and classroom management, enhanced professional confidence and job satisfaction for teachers, and positive impacts on overall school culture and student achievement (Jimerson & Myers, 2024; Juhji et al., 2022). Conversely, when support plans are inconsistently implemented, lack targeted feedback, or occur in a negative school culture, teachers are less likely to experience meaningful growth, potentially reinforcing existing performance challenges (Koli Plaku & Leka, 2025).

This framework positions administrator-led support plans as the central mechanism linking leadership actions to teacher development and school improvement (Jimerson & Myers, 2024). The framework also reflects the bidirectional and iterative nature of growth: as teachers respond to feedback and demonstrate improved performance, administrators can refine support strategies, fostering a continuous cycle of learning and improvement (Jimerson & Myers, 2024; Koli Plaku & Leka, 2025). By integrating the elements of social interaction, scaffolding, and guided professional growth, this conceptual framework provides a clear lens for interpreting the experiences of school administrators as they develop, execute, and monitor support plans for underperforming teachers. It illustrates the pathways through which leadership practices directly influence teacher outcomes and, ultimately, student success.

Methods

This study employed an interpretive qualitative method of inquiry. An interpretive qualitative method of inquiry is a research approach that seeks to understand and explain the meaning of human experiences, behaviors, and social phenomena from the perspective of the participants rather than through objective measurement (Creswell & Creswell, 2022). A qualitative method was chosen for this study because it allows for a deeper, more nuanced understanding of administrators' insights, offering a platform for them to share their personal experiences, challenges, and successes in supporting underperforming teachers. Unlike quantitative data, which often focuses on measurable outcomes, qualitative research captures the richness of human experience, contextual factors, and the relational dynamics that influence leadership decisions (Bhattacharya, 2017).

Qualitative research is particularly valuable for examining complex social phenomena because it allows researchers to explore how individuals interpret experiences, relationships, and contextual influences within real-world settings (Lim, 2025).; Lim et al., 2023). You may want to add this citation as well since your framework is social constructivism. Qualitative methods provide the tools necessary to explore the nuances (e.g. characteristics and contradictions) of human behaviors (e.g. beliefs, perceptions, and actions) and interactions, capturing the complexity (breadth and depth) that these phenomena entail (Lim et al., 2023).

Specifically, the study used one-on-one interviews to explore the lived realities of school administrators as they design and implement teacher support plans, uncovering the layers of complexity involved in improving instructional performance (Bhattacharya, 2017; Butin, 2010; Efrat & Ravid, 2019). School administrators serve as instructional leaders responsible for ensuring that all educators are equipped to deliver high-quality instruction, and their insights are

critical in understanding how to effectively address teacher underperformance (Aravena 2023; Yariv & Kass, 2019). By using a qualitative approach, this study sought to capture the nuanced and often unseen experiences, challenges, and strategies administrators employ in guiding teacher improvement.

Through in-depth interviews the study aimed to uncover the thought process, decision-making practice, and contextual factors that influence how support plans are created and carried out. It explored how administrators identify underperforming teachers, assess their specific needs, and select appropriate interventions whether through mentorship, coaching, professional development, or other forms of assistance. The study also explored how administrators navigate relational dynamics, manage resistance to feedback, and maintain teacher morale during what can be a difficult and sensitive process. By centering the voices and lived experiences of administrators, this research intended to provide a richer understanding of the real-world complexities involved in improving teacher performance. The goal was to generate meaningful insights that can inform future leadership practices, promote more effective teacher support systems, and ultimately contribute to better instructional quality and student achievement.

In addition to semi-structured interviews, this study incorporated qualitative document analysis as a supplementary data source. Document analysis was used to examine artifacts related to teacher support and growth plans, including anonymized support plans, observation tools, feedback forms, and relevant campus or district documentation. The inclusion of document analysis allowed for data triangulation while strengthening the credibility of the study by providing additional context and evidence to support administrators' perspectives (Bowen, 2009; Creswell & Creswell, 2022). These documents offered insight into how support plans are

formally structured, implemented, and monitored within school settings, and they helped complement interview data and enhance the overall depth of analysis.

Definition of Key Terms

The following key terms were used in this dissertation to help readers understand any terminology that may be ambiguous, unclear, or that may hold more than one meaning.

More Knowledgeable Other (MKO). More knowledgeable others reference someone who has a better understanding or a higher skill level than the learner in a particular area (Saleem et al., 2021). In this study, this role is fulfilled by school administrators.

Underperforming teacher. Underperforming teachers refer to a teacher with more than five years of experience who is still facing substantial and ongoing difficulties (Yariv & Kass, 2019).

Support Plans. Support plans are structured and personalized plans designed to help teachers improve their professional practice. They are typically developed by school administrators in collaboration with the teacher and may also involve instructional coaches (Hallinger et al., 2014).

Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). The zone of proximal development refers to the range of tasks a learner can perform with the help and guidance of a more knowledgeable person but cannot yet do independently (Walqui & Van Lier, 2010).

Limitations and Delimitations

This research study included common limitations innate to the qualitative method of inquiry. In general, qualitative research is limited by its small, non-representative sample sizes, reliance on subjective interpretation, potential for researcher bias, challenges in replicability, and limited generalizability to larger populations (Creswell & Creswell, 2022). Specifically, the

purposive sampling technique may limit the perspectives of participants as these can be shaped by their unique school environments, local policies, and individual leadership styles. Additionally, my interpretation of the interview data may have carried some degree of subjectivity despite efforts to maintain rigor and trustworthiness.

Delimitations of this study include its focus on administrators within public K-12 schools and its emphasis on support plans for experienced teachers struggling with instructional performance. The study did not explore novice teacher induction, non-instructional staff development, or district-level policy decisions beyond their impact on school-level support plans. These boundaries were intentionally set to allow for an in-depth examination of administrator-led interventions aimed at improving teacher effectiveness.

Researcher Positionality

In this study, my positionality as a current educator and current graduate student directly informed my understanding of the complexities involved in supporting underperforming teachers. With experience in evaluating instructional practices, designing professional development, and managing teacher performance, I brought an insider's perspective to the research. This background allowed me to approach interviews with an informed lens, attuned to the practical challenges and emotional nuances administrators face when developing and implementing support plans. At the same time, I acknowledge that my familiarity with school leadership may introduce interpretive bias. To address this, I employed reflexivity throughout the research process by journaling assumptions, critically examining my influence during data collection and analysis, and remaining open to perspectives that diverge from my own. My role as a peer in the profession also facilitated trust and rapport with the participants, encouraging candid dialogue. However, I recognized that shared professional experiences can sometimes lead

to over-identification or assumptions of common understanding. Therefore, I made deliberate efforts to ask clarifying questions and interpret responses through participants' own contexts rather than through my own experiences. By actively reflecting on my dual identity as a researcher and practitioner, I sought to preserve both analytical rigor and authenticity in capturing administrators' lived experiences.

Summary

This chapter provides an overview of the evolving landscape of education, highlighting the shifting roles and responsibilities of schools, administrators, and teachers over time. As the demands on the education system have grown, so has the expectation for educators to meet high standards of instructional quality and student achievement. Teachers are now expected not only to deliver curriculum effectively but also to differentiate instruction, manage diverse classrooms, integrate technology, and support students' social-emotional development. In response, the role of school administrators has expanded beyond traditional managerial duties to encompass instructional leadership, teacher development, and the creation of a supportive learning environment for both students and staff.

The central focus of this chapter was the critical role teachers play in student learning and the vital support administrators provide, especially for those teachers who may be struggling to meet performance expectations. Recognizing that the quality of teaching is the most influential in-school factor affecting student outcomes, it is essential that administrators are equipped to support teacher growth through thoughtful, individualized support plans. These plans are not merely compliance tools but are intended to foster professional development, boost teacher confidence, and ultimately improve classroom instruction.

This study was anchored in a conceptual framework derived from social constructivism, specifically through Vygotsky's pivotal concept of the ZPD, the role of the more knowledgeable other, social interaction, and scaffolding. These principles empower school administrators to effectively identify the specific developmental needs of underperforming teachers. By stepping into the role of the more knowledgeable others, administrators can implement targeted scaffolding and facilitate collaborative social interactions that foster supportive professional environments. This framework equips administrators to provide meaningful and structured support, driving teacher growth and significantly enhancing instructional practice.

By capturing administrators' experiences, insights, and reflections, this research aims to contribute to the development of best practices for teacher support and instructional improvement. The goal is to provide practical, research-based guidance that informs leadership practices, strengthens teacher capacity, and leads to improved student outcomes. Chapter 1 included the background of the study, a statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, the significance of the study, research questions, conceptual framework, methods, definition of key terms, limitations and delimitations, and researcher positionality. Chapter 2 encompasses a review of the literature, with a focus on administrators' ability to design and implement growth plans and support for underperforming teachers. Chapter 3 fully discusses the methodology of the study, Chapter 4 describes the findings of the results, and Chapter 5 includes a summary of the study, a discussion of the findings, and the recommendations.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This study undertook a comprehensive examination of the development, implementation, and challenges of teacher support plans for underperforming teachers, explicitly focusing on the unique perspective of school administrators. A comprehensive literature review was conducted, searching thoroughly in exploring this topic and establishing the need for further examination. The development and implementation of teacher support and support plans for low-performing educators present a complex landscape of challenges, tensions, and opportunities, particularly from the perspective of school administrators. Historically, the role of school administrators has evolved to encompass a wide range of responsibilities, including establishing a clear school vision and mission, ensuring instructional quality and accountability, and managing school operations. Central to this role is the task of supporting teachers through practices such as classroom observations, professional development, and individualized support plans, which are often crucial for addressing the needs of underperforming teachers. This literature review explores key aspects of this topic, including the terminology used to describe underperforming teachers, national and global statistics on teacher performance, and the impact of teachers on student growth.

Additionally, it explored the challenges and tensions administrators face, such as navigating teacher unions, adhering to policy requirements for documentation, and addressing questions about the validity and effectiveness of support and support plans. By synthesizing existing research, this review aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of how administrators can navigate these dynamics to foster teacher and student success.

This comprehensive review ensured that the study's findings, enriched by the administrator's perspective, are based on a solid foundation of existing knowledge. The research was guided by the following questions:

1. What do administrators describe as important features or components of support plans for underperforming teachers?
2. What are the challenges and tensions administrators experience when developing and implementing teacher support plans?
3. How do school administrators execute and monitor teacher support plans to promote teacher growth and improved instructional practices?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework is crucial in research as it guided the study's direction and structure. This study is grounded in social constructivism, which provides insights into how learning occurs through social processes. It specifically explores Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), along with the concepts of scaffolding, social interaction, and the more knowledgeable other. These theories are particularly relevant to adult learning, as they emphasize the importance of collaborative experiences and support systems in acquiring new skills. By applying these principles, the study aims to highlight how adult learners can benefit from structured support and interaction in their learning journeys.

Research shows that Vygotsky emphasized the social nature of learning (Walqui & van Lier, 2010). Vygotsky's concept of the Zone of Proximal Development is deeply connected to teaching, as it provides a framework for understanding how learners acquire new skills and knowledge most effectively (Hughes, 2021; Rigopouli, et al., 2025; Walqui & Van Lier, 2010). Within the ZPD, peers can serve as resources, helping one another solve problems or understand

concepts, therefore work or peer tutoring allows students to collaborate and learn from those who are slightly more advanced (Walqui & van Lier, 2010). The ZPD refers to the range of tasks that a learner cannot yet perform independently but can accomplish with guidance and support from a more knowledgeable individual, such as a teacher or peer (Van Huizen et al., 2005; Walqui & Van Lier, 2010).

Under the social constructivism theory, the MKO refers to someone who possesses a higher level of knowledge, skill, or experience in a particular area and can guide and support the learner's development (Saleem et al., 2020). Vygotsky emphasized that learning is fundamentally a social process (Walqui & van Lier, 2010). The MKO plays a crucial role in assisting individuals as they navigate their ZPD by offering instruction, modeling, and feedback (Saleem et al., 2020; Walqui & van Lier, 2010). These interactions enable learners to acquire new skills and insights that they could not attain independently (Walqui & van Lier, 2010). In educational settings, the MKO can be a teacher, mentor, peer, or administrator who provides essential scaffolding to foster the learner's growth.

On the other hand, Walqui (2006) emphasized that scaffolding instruction is crucial for facilitating learning within the ZPD. Teaching within the ZPD involves providing structured support to help learners connect their current abilities with their potential for development (Walqui, 2006). Scaffolding strategies, such as breaking tasks into smaller steps, offering hints, modeling behaviors, and employing questioning techniques, assist adult learners in making progress. As individuals become more competent, the instructor gradually reduces support, enabling them to work independently (Walqui & van Lier, 2010).

Social interactions play a crucial role in social constructivism, serving as the foundation for knowledge building and meaning creation (Rannikmai et al., 2020; Saleem et al., 2021).

Vygotsky highlighted that learning first occurs at the social level before it is internalized by the individual (Walqui & van Lier, 2010). Through engaging with others, learners are introduced to new ideas, encouraged to think critically, and supported in developing new skills (Saleem et al., 2020; Walqui & van Lier, 2010). Ultimately, social interaction propels cognitive development, transforming learning into a collaborative and dynamic process.

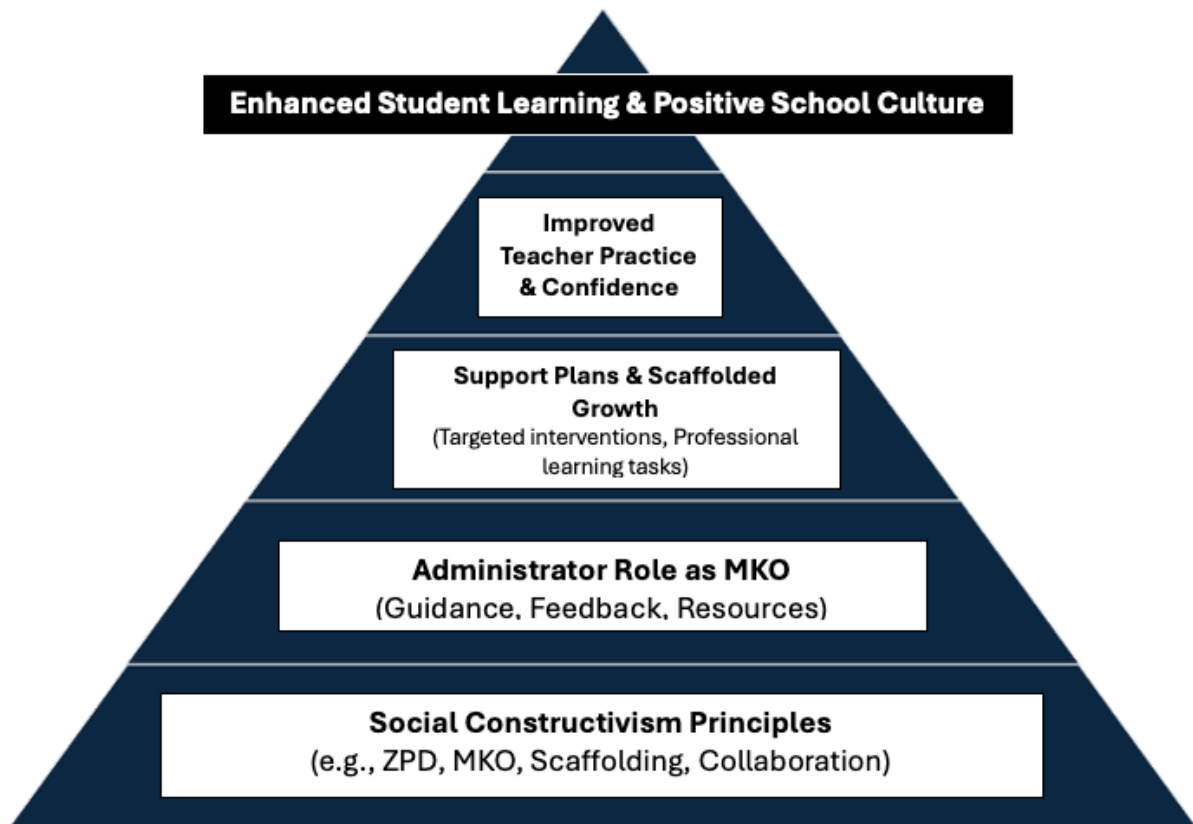
Within this framework, school administrators function as MKOs, guiding teacher growth by identifying areas for improvement, offering targeted feedback, and facilitating access to resources and professional learning opportunities (Suryanto et al., 2024). These actions create a learning environment in which teachers can engage in development tasks within their ZPD, where appropriate scaffolding enables mastery of new instructional or classroom management skills (Jimerson & Myers, 2024). This framework outlines how intentional leadership practices contribute to three interrelated outcomes: (1) improved instructional practices and classroom management; (2) increased professional confidence and job satisfaction among teachers; and (3) positive effects on school culture and student achievement (Jimerson & Myers, 2024; Juhji et al., 2022). On the other hand, ineffective implementation, including lack of feedback, poor follow-through, or unsupportive school climates, can hinder teacher growth and exacerbate performance issues (Koli Plaku & Leka, 2025).

The administrator-led support plan is thus conceptualized as the primary mechanism linking leadership actions to both teacher development and school improvement (Jimerson & Myers, 2024). This model also accounts for the recursive nature of growth, in which teacher improvement informs future leadership strategies, creating an ongoing cycle of feedback and development (Jimerson & Myers, 2024; Koli Plaku & Leka, 2025). Figure 1.1 illustrates the

conceptual framework for administrator-led teacher support within the social constructivist model.

Figure 1.1

Conceptual framework



Through this lens, the conceptual framework underscores the central role of social interaction and scaffolding in professional growth, providing a basis for analyzing how administrators experience and shape support plans for underperforming teachers. It highlights how leadership practices can directly influence teacher effectiveness and, ultimately, student learning outcomes.

Review of the Literature

In order to determine what constitutes a low-performing teacher, various factors must be considered. According to Rhodes and Beinecke (2011), it is not self-evident that teacher performance is poor. Experts argue that several factors contribute to poor teacher performance, including school performance criteria, complaints from parents, students, and colleagues, student behavior, classroom observations from administrators and teacher mentors, and low academic achievement (Aravena, 2023; Rhodes & Beinecke, 2011). Underperforming teachers face challenges in effectively managing their classrooms, encounter difficulties in planning engaging and effective lessons, struggle to monitor student progress, maintain low expectations for their students, and demonstrate an inability to adapt to change (Chamberlin et al., 2005). Chamberlin et al. define a "competent" teacher as someone who is legally qualified and capable of carrying out tasks. On the other hand, a teacher is considered to be incompetent if they do not possess the ability, skill, or will to carry out teaching tasks (Aravena, 2023; Chamberlin et al., 2005).

Furthermore, Aravena (2023), explains that there are five categories that help determine unsatisfactory teacher performance: technical failure (teaching methods), bureaucratic failure (compliance with school district expectations), ethical failure (negative attitudes toward students and teacher duties), productive failure (low academic progress and poor classroom climate), and personal failure (emotional instability and lack of self-control). Additionally, teachers who lack content knowledge, and classroom management, behave unprofessionally, and willfully neglect their duties are coined several names such as incompetent, low-performing, and challenging (Chamberlin et. al, 2005; Yariv, 2004; Yariv & Kass 2019). As a result, school principals have to rely on a combination of evidence in order to identify a low-performing teacher such as school performance, student academic achievement, and parent complaints (Aravena, 2023). Overall,

several factors must be considered to determine if a teacher is incompetent and unable to carry out their duties.

Terms for Underperforming teachers

It is essential to understand the criteria for identifying underperforming teachers and the various terms used to describe them. Research indicates that multiple terms have been created to describe ineffective employees, but the terminology can sometimes cause confusion rather than clarity (Yariv, 2004). Chamberlin et al. (2005) clearly define a "competent" teacher as someone who is legally qualified and capable of carrying out tasks. Conversely, a teacher is deemed incompetent if they lack the ability, skill, or will, to carry out teaching tasks (Aravena, 2023; Chamberlin et al., 2005). According to Tucker (2001), incompetence is defined as the lack of relevant content knowledge or sufficient skills in areas of instruction and classroom management. On the other hand, a "marginal teacher" has content knowledge but lacks classroom management, which impedes student learning (Sweeney & Manatt, 1984). Rhodes and Beneicke (2003) use the term "poor performing teachers" when referring to teachers who are struggling with discipline, poor teaching, and attitudes towards students. Furthermore, Range et al. (2012) use the term "incompetent teachers" to refer to teachers who have a negative impact on student achievement, disrupt other staff members, and consume administrators' time. In addition, Yariv and Kass (2019) use the term "underperforming teacher" to refer to a teacher with more than five years of experience who is still facing substantial and ongoing difficulties at work. Most of these categorizations focus on the teaching traits of individual teachers; however, the line that separates competent individuals from incompetent ones is not always clear.

Statistics on Underperforming Teacher

The rising statistics on underperforming teachers worldwide highlight a critical issue that threatens the quality of education and effectiveness of global learning systems. Research from various countries confidently showed that ineffective teachers represented approximately 5% to 7% of the workforce (Yariv, 2004; Zhang, 2007), with some estimates rising to as much as 15% (Dandoy, 2012). These figures are consistent and reliable across multiple contexts. For instance, data from the 2007-2008 American Schools and Staffing Survey indicated that around 82% of 4,601 school principals chose to renew contracts for all tenured teachers, irrespective of their performance, even including those rated as "unsatisfactory" or "fair." Additional findings from Weisberg et al. (2009), which surveyed 15,000 teachers and 1,300 school administrators, revealed that over 99% of teachers received a "satisfactory" rating on a binary evaluation scale. Moreover, 81% of school principals acknowledged that at least one tenured teacher in their school was underperforming. Furthermore, in England, evidence suggested that cases of alleged incompetence are on the rise (Wragg et al., 2000). This clearly highlights the challenges within the educational system regarding teacher effectiveness.

Range et al. (2012) confidently reported that 8.44% of teachers were identified as incompetent by American school principals, a figure that exceeds the 7% recognized by Yariv (2004) in Israel. This indicates a pressing need to focus on teacher effectiveness in the U.S. Additionally, Zhang (2007) asserted that incompetency ranks as the most prevalent type of teacher misbehavior in several countries, including the U.S., China, Germany, and Japan. Research indicated that 4% of the teaching workforce in the United Kingdom is ineffective (Yariv, 2004). These findings clearly demonstrate the crucial importance of addressing teacher competency to foster an effective and engaging learning environment across diverse educational

contexts. For a U.S. based study, this is particularly important because teacher effectiveness directly impacts student achievement, classroom dynamics, and overall educational outcomes.

R1: Administrator Perspectives on Teacher Support Plans

The roles and responsibilities of school administrators have undergone significant changes over time. A school administrator is responsible for overseeing daily operations, managing staff, implementing educational policies, fostering a positive school culture, ensuring student success, and maintaining communication with parents and the community (Martinez & Molidor, 2024). However, the role of school administrators has evolved. According to Tutkum and Aksoyalp (2012), during the 1950s, they primarily focused on two aspects: educational and administrative, essentially serving as agents of change. A major shift occurred in the 1970s and 1980s, when the primary role transitioned to school efficiency (Tutkum & Aksoyalp, 2012). By the 1990s, the school administrator role was redefined as that of a transformational leader, a key factor in school effectiveness and educational improvements such as changes in teachers' classroom behavior, individualized student instruction, and school organization (Tutkum & Aksoyalp, 2012).

With the advent of powerful economic, social challenges, and technological demands, the school administrator role has evolved to include crucial 21st-century skills such as problem-solving and knowledge of cultures, in addition to meeting the needs of not just students and staff but also parents, community, and administration (Collin, 2004; Riehl, 2000; Tutkum & Aksoyalp, 2012). Sahin (2023) emphasized that the role of school administrators has evolved to include responsibilities such as developing and implementing an educational vision, overseeing personnel and human resources, managing relationships between the school and the broader community, fostering professional learning communities, evaluating teacher performance, and

promoting student achievement. The demands of the 21st century have significantly impacted the role and responsibilities of school administrators such as technology integration, diversity and inclusion, educational reforms and policy changes, and student mental health and well-being.

School's Vision and School Culture

One of the critical roles of a school principal is to shape the school's vision and culture and ensure a safe learning environment with common goals. Experts argue that to lead strategically, school principals must have a clear vision (Stringer & Hourani, 2015).

Furthermore, as part of the new demands, school administrators must create a clear vision shared with all employees, students, and the community (Sahin, 2023) and ensure every decision meets the vision and school goals (Firestone, 1996). As a result, the school principal sets clear expectations for targeted outcomes and communicates them to everyone (Firestone, 1996).

Therefore, to promote and uphold the school, the principal must assist teachers in comprehending the school's vision (Crow et al., 2002). Fostering a clear vision is one of a school principal's many significant roles and responsibilities since it provides direction and a unified purpose.

School principals must establish a school culture and involve all stakeholders. Studies have found that school principals must promote a safe atmosphere and environment (Koli Plaku & Leka, 2025; Sahin, 2023). Additionally, principals manage the decision-making process involving all stakeholders (Sahin, 2023). Furthermore, the stakeholders see the school administrator as the person who coordinates educational activities (Stringer & Hourani, 2016). Thus, principals are expected to promote a safe learning environment for students and teachers, including the student handbook, where the teachers and parents clearly understand student

expectations and outcomes (Stringer & Hourani, 2016). To involve all stakeholders is crucial, and it is a major responsibility of school administrators.

Instruction and Accountability

As an instructional leader, the school principal is responsible for impacting teachers and students. Research indicates that school principals have a vital role in developing the school as a whole within the understanding of instructional leadership (Koli Plaku & Leka, 2025; Sahin, 2023). According to Range et al. (2012) and backed by Aravena (2023), school principals have a powerful indirect impact on student academic achievement more significantly than the teacher. Upon further research, it has been found that the primary responsibility of school principals is to oversee instructional practices (Aravena, 2023). As a result, school principals influence student achievement by improving teacher practices; this is done through teacher-classroom observations (Range et al., 2012). Furthermore, Range et al. (2012) noted that principals engage in formative supervision by regularly observing classrooms to gather data on teacher performance, which is later used to inform summative evaluations. Ing (2010) emphasized that classroom observations are crucial for influencing both instruction and learning outcomes. By conducting these observations, principals are able to gain firsthand insights into teaching practices, which helps them provide targeted feedback that fosters teacher growth and effectiveness. This practice aligns with school district protocols that encourage principals to prioritize classroom visits (Ing, 2010; Stringer & Hourani, 2016). Furthermore, Stringer and Hourani (2016) highlighted that a principal can significantly impact student achievement by concentrating on two key areas: developing effective teachers and establishing robust systems.

Martinot et al. (2022) found that teachers and peers are the most influential sources of support for promoting school engagement, especially for students from disadvantaged (priority

education) areas. For administrators, this underscores the importance of actively supporting teachers' relational roles, ensuring they have the time, training, and conditions necessary to build meaningful connections that foster student belonging and engagement. Through regular observations, principals can identify strengths and areas for improvement among their teaching staff, facilitating professional development that is tailored to individual needs (Jimerson & Myers, 2024; Koli Plaku & Leka, 2025). This targeted approach not only enhances teacher effectiveness but also creates a positive learning environment for students (Mejia, 2016). Therefore, the role of a school principal is vital for boosting student achievement, as their observations and support for teachers directly influence instructional quality and outcomes in the classroom.

School principals must know the curriculum and be able to provide targeted professional development for their teachers. Studies show that providing professional development is one of the crucial roles of school principals (Stringer & Hourani, 2016). According to Donaldson and Mavrogordato (2018), school principals are responsible for providing professional development to teachers. School principals should understand the needs of their teachers and stay informed about educational trends to provide targeted, ongoing professional development that enhances instructional practices and student learning outcomes (Juhji et al., 2022; Ventista & Brown, 2023).

School Operations

School operations go beyond just non-instructional tasks. Research shows that school principals oversee operations, rules, and regulations to achieve their goals (Aravena, 2023; Sahin, 2023). Valenzuela and Bienvinida (2021) concluded that school principals have six main focuses under school operations, including managing school facilities, safety, and equipment.

Furthermore, Stringer and Hourani (2016) explained that principals are responsible for fostering student success by effectively managing school operations, resources, and organizational systems to ensure a safe and productive learning environment. This includes developing, reviewing, and implementing school policies and procedures as needed. On the other hand, Firestone (1996) described school operations as including textbooks, state standardized testing, managing students and staff, schedules, and grades. In addition to overseeing school management and cleaning, there is also responsibility for managing all activities throughout the school day, including maintaining school gardens and coordinating school ceremonies (Sahin, 2023). School operations encompass more than just the day-to-day management of school activities. They include overseeing infrastructure both inside and outside the school building, as well as managing non-instructional responsibilities.

School operations also mean knowing local and state policy. Policymakers are always trying to refine what constitutes effective teaching, as they did with No Child Left Behind (Rangel et al., 2012). Consequently, in the United States, policies such as Every Student Succeeds Act give states the autonomy to determine the roles of school principals (Reid, 2020). On the other hand, in countries such as Chile, different policies have been implemented to hold school principals accountable for instructional practices (Aravena, 2023). These tasks fall under the roles and responsibilities of school principals under school operations. Which is vital to understand how to support underperforming teachers, highlighting key insights from school administrators on challenges and growth opportunities (Aravena, 2023; Chan et al. 2022). By analyzing the implementation of these plans, I revealed effective strategies, identify barriers, and target areas for improvement, thereby enhancing teacher development.

Classroom Observations

Support providers serve as mentors and coaches to teachers (Karge, 2020). The success or failure of this relationship is directly connected to teacher retention, which in turn can help alleviate current and impending teacher shortages (Karge, 2020). School principals are responsible for ensuring that students receive high-quality instruction. When a teacher is not performing to the expected level of rigor, the school principal must support the teachers, especially those who are struggling. According to Aravena (2023), school principals play a crucial role in supporting and evaluating teachers. In addition, studies indicate that principals prioritizing instructional practices have a more significant impact on student learning outcomes and teaching, especially true for principals who focus on helping teachers improve their performance (Aravena, 2023). Thus, the most influential method for the school principal to impact student performance is to help teachers improve their practices, and one way is by conducting classroom observations (Aravena, 2023; Range et al., 2012). Research shows principals should routinely visit classrooms to supervise and evaluate teachers (Ing, 2009; Range et al., 2012). The primary role of teacher evaluation is to provide feedback and suggestions for improvement, significantly if the teachers are underperforming, and to ensure that they meet the teaching standards' rigor (Range et al., 2012). However, classroom observations must be followed up with a coaching conversation; otherwise, the feedback is ineffective (Frasier, 2022; Range et al., 2012). Conducting classroom observations and gathering data is essential to determine the next steps for supporting underperforming teachers.

Professional Development for an Underperforming Teacher

Ertürk (2021) found that school administrators' informational and emotional support significantly predicted teachers' job satisfaction and subjective well-being, highlighting the

critical role of supportive leadership in fostering a positive work environment for educators. The way in which principals view teachers can have great variation depending on the perceived qualities of the teacher. For example, Karasel Ayda et al. (2018) found that principals viewed self-actualizing and socially oriented teachers positively, while they held mixed or negative views toward teachers with rational-economic or complex human natures. Administrators' attitudes varied, with some responding supportively through appreciation and motivation, while others relied on punitive or indifferent approaches depending on the teacher's perceived disposition.

Apart from classroom observations, school principals support underperforming teachers in other ways. First, studies in the United Kingdom suggest principals should have supportive dialogues with underperforming teachers; this will allow for understanding the root causes of the problem and better inform a solution (Rhodes & Beneicke, 2003). Based on findings, some professional development that school principals suggest to underperforming teachers are lesson planning with an instructional coach, lesson observations, observing other colleagues, identifying professional development within the school district, or assigning them to a mentor (Rhodes & Beneicke, 2003; Yariv & Kass, 2019). Furthermore, studies have shown that mentoring improves teacher performance (Yariv & Kass, 2019). Thus, coaching and mentoring are the most common practices when supporting underperforming teachers.

School principals identify areas of opportunity and provide professional development for teachers. As Ing (2010) explained, principals who are cognizant of the instructional needs of their organizations are better positioned to make informed decisions that will positively impact student learning. Moreover, not knowing the specific support required for underperforming teachers can result in unreasonable support and poor student academic achievement outcomes

(Rhodes & Beneicke, 2003). As mentioned in Aravena (2023), quality teaching affects student achievement. Range et al. (2012) stated that the foundational mechanisms through which principals influence student achievement are by aiding teachers in improving their practice, which is a process defined as instructional leadership. School principals are instructional leaders, but most importantly, they are responsible for students' academic achievement in their buildings.

R2. Challenges for School Administrators When Supporting Underperforming Teachers

School administrators face many challenges when putting a teacher on a support/growth plan. Research highlights that the process of dismissing teachers is complex and involves several important steps, suggesting that a thoughtful and systematic approach is essential for fair outcomes (Bridges, 1992; Mpundu et al., 2023; Tucker, 1997; Wragg et al., 2000; Zavgorodniy & Akhmatshina, 2022). Moreover, research clearly demonstrates that bureaucratic barriers and administrative procedures pose significant challenges for school administrators when it comes to dismissing teachers (Dandoy, 2012). By addressing these issues head-on, administrators can enhance their decision-making processes and promote a stronger educational framework (Dandoy, 2012). On the other hand, evidence shows that dismissing teachers is the last resource for school administrators (Yariv & Coleman, 2005). In addition, Yariv (2009) clearly indicated that school administrators tend to avoid dismissal due to its ethical complexities and the substantial organizational and interpersonal repercussions involved. Furthermore, in the process of identifying underperforming teachers, administrators confidently face the important decision of whether to renew a teacher's contract or pursue a necessary, albeit extensive, legal path that may involve interactions with teacher unions, documenting teachers, and policy.

Teacher Unions in Education Systems

One of the more pressing issues related to teachers' unions and administrative relationships is the matter of disciplining and terminating ineffective educators. To understand the complexities surrounding teacher disciplining and termination, it is necessary to explore the role of teacher unions. Depending on the stakeholder perspective, they can be considered an important support structure or systemic obstacle. Outwardly, it may appear that teachers' unions primarily focus on advocating for better pay and working conditions for their members, playing a limited role in the overall structure and performance of public schools (Moe, 2001; Washira, 2021). For example, teacher unions in Kenya have not only focused on improving the working conditions of teachers but have also played a significant role in shaping educational policy (Washira, 2021). However, research indicates that teacher unions have a greater influence on public schools than any other group in American society (Moe, 2001). Experts contend that their influence is twofold: they shape schools from the grassroots through collective bargaining affecting nearly every aspect of education and engage in political activities that influence laws and regulations. (Moe, 2001; Washira, 2021). Furthermore, it is well established that collective bargaining can impact all aspects of the workplace and shape educational outcomes (Eberts, 2007). Furthermore, in countries like Mexico, unions provide teachers with a collective voice to express their ideas and concerns (Bensusan & Tapia, 2013).

As a result, the growing formalization of procedures due to unionization limits school administrators' ability to effectively manage their schools (Bensusan & Tapia, 2013). Ngwa (2018) found that union contracts can restrict administrators' ability to coach or dismiss underperforming teachers. This, in turn, affects their decision-making regarding key issues and their management of the teaching staff (Bensusan & Tapia, 2013). When school administrators

have greater autonomy, they can terminate teachers' employment, leading to conflicts with teacher unions (Yariv & Kass, 2019). Additionally, union leaders can choose how vigorously to defend a teacher and may influence the process through their guidance, making the dismissal process more dynamic (Donaldson & Mavrogordato, 2018). According to Wragg et al., (2000), teacher unions are often caught in a conflict between the desire to weed out poorly performing teachers in order to preserve good professional reputation and the need to protect their individual members. Teacher unions significantly influence education by advocating for the rights and interests of educators while shaping broader educational policies; overall unions wield considerable power over public schools.

It is problematic to look at teachers' unions as an obstacle only to smooth administrative function. There are a number of ways that unions have and can positively impact school conditions and culture. The quality of teacher working conditions factors heavily into their decisions to remain in the profession and how they prosper in the profession (Marianno & Relles, 2021). Marianno and Relles (2021) employed complexity theory to show how union collective bargaining is shaped not only by labor-management dynamics, but also by deeper interdependencies among teachers, principals, parents, politicians, and other stakeholders. Rather than viewing tensions as conflict, the authors argue they are signs of systemic adaptation, where school infrastructure and social relationships gradually shift to balance student-centered priorities with union-driven teacher protections. According to Rajendran (2025), teacher unions have been successful in implementing formal mechanisms to elevate racial equity, teacher agency, and professional autonomy. When teacher unions take an active role in advancing equity, it should be recognized as a form of district-level leadership (Rajendran, 2025). This carries with it the

potential to target and support better hires, which in turn could lead to fewer low performing teachers.

Han and Garcia (2023) further concluded that weaker unions lead to more teacher stress, while stronger unions help reduce teacher stress, especially for key subgroups like male teachers, experienced teachers, more qualified teachers, and STEM-subject teachers. Less stressed teachers would be better-performing and less likely to need administrative interventions. Beyond this, teacher unions are also instrumental in influencing policy development, which in turn could be a potential positive or negative construct for administration. Tarlau et al. (2025) found that teacher unions are impacting education policy through collaborations with academics to develop just, community-centered alternatives to dominant education reform. These efforts are shaped by neoliberalism, state repression, and political alliances (Tarlau et al., 2025). These findings would suggest that administrators should view teacher unions not as barriers but as complex, interdependent forces that can enhance school culture, reduce teacher stress, promote equity, influence policy, and contribute to long-term improvements in teacher retention, performance, and shared leadership.

Policy

Policy plays a crucial role in shaping education systems, influencing everything from curriculum design to resource allocation. To begin with, policymakers are resolutely committed to clearly defining effective teaching, as illustrated by the significant emphasis on teaching quality in the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001, and this unwavering focus on teaching effectiveness will continue to be a central priority moving forward (Range et al., 2012). Evidence suggests that NCLB has been broadly recognized as an unprecedented entry by the federal government into matters of education previously left to the states and school districts (Cochran-

Smith & Lytle, 2006). Furthermore, The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) significantly affected teaching by emphasizing standardized testing as a measure of school and teacher performance (Cochran et al., 2006; Range et al., 2012). Given that NCLB aimed to close achievement gaps and ensure accountability, its rigid requirements and punitive measures for underperforming schools created challenges, such as reduced teacher autonomy and heightened stress in the classroom (Cochran et al., 2006).

In the United Kingdom, numerous policy-driven initiatives have created recent pressure and support from the central government aimed at improving the quality of teaching and learning in classrooms, thereby enhancing standards in schools; leading school administrators have been more proactive in dismissing incompetent teachers (Rhodes & Beneicke, 2003). In contrast, the United States still struggles with an effective resolution for this issue (Range et al., 2012). The primary reason for this challenge is the absence of a reliable system for assessing teacher incompetence (Borremans & Spilt, 2022; Range et al., 2012). Conversely, poorly designed policies can exacerbate inequality and hinder educational progress, underscoring their profound impact on shaping future generations.

Reasons and Challenges for Documenting and Removing Teachers

Documenting teachers presents several challenges, including ensuring consistency and fairness in evaluations, subjective biases, varying teaching contexts, and differences in student demographics, which can make it difficult to create a one-size-fits-all approach. When teachers are documented by their administrators, it usually means that the administrator is keeping a formal record of concerns, incidents, or performance-related issues (Yariv, 2004; Yariv & Kass, 2019). Documentation can serve as a tool for improvement, but it can also be used as a record if disciplinary actions become necessary (Yariv & Kass, 2019). Ultimately, documentation is

intended to support teacher growth and accountability, ensuring a positive learning environment for both educators and students.

Teacher dismissals are influenced by a variety of legal, economic, political, and social factors (Aravena, 2023). Research indicates that principals often hesitate to pursue dismissals due to a fear of conflict, a belief that they may lack the necessary expertise, or concerns about the potential negative impact a dismissal could have on school morale (Donaldson & Mavrogordato, 2018). Moreover, studies have found that the growing formalization of procedures due to unionization limits school administrators' ability to effectively manage their schools, including dismissing ineffective teachers (Bensusan & Tapia, 2013). Documenting a teacher's performance can be quite complex, which often leads school administrators to hesitate to take decisive action to remove ineffective teachers (Weisberg et al., 2009). A key reason for this is that school leaders are hesitant to acknowledge their supervision of ineffective teachers and are reluctant to address the issue (Range et al., 2012). School leaders often try to conceal their weaknesses, and feelings of frustration and shame are often hidden by denial and misrepresentation (Yariv, 2004).

As a result, school principals often feel uncertain about whether their school district will back their efforts to terminate a teacher (Donaldson & Mavrogordato, 2018). Research indicates that teachers are the primary factor influencing student success, in addition to the teacher's role, school leadership also impacts student learning outcomes (Aravena, 2023). Limited time and resources for thorough observations and feedback further complicate the process, often leaving teachers without meaningful support for professional growth, and balancing accountability with encouragement remains a key challenge in effectively documenting teaching performance (Yariv & Kass, 2019; Aravena, 2023). When school administrators possess increased autonomy, they

gain the authority to terminate teachers' employment, which may result in conflicts with teacher unions (Yariv & Kass, 2019). Additionally, union leaders have the ability to decide the extent of their advocacy for a teacher, and their involvement can significantly influence the dismissal process, rendering it more dynamic (Donaldson & Mavrogordato, 2018). Clearly, the issue of poor performance is not addressed solely within one school or by an individual principal; it involves political and legal bodies, as well as workers' unions.

Student Growth

Teachers play a critical role in shaping student growth, as their instructional practices, expertise, and relationships with students directly influence academic achievement and overall development. Research consistently highlights that teacher quality is one of the most significant in-school factors affecting student outcomes (Aravena, 2023). Furthermore, teacher preparation and development are essential components in cultivating effective teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2017). Teacher preparation and development are critical foundations for producing effective educators (Darling-Hammond, 2017). Research clearly establishes that teachers are the most pivotal factor in determining student success (Aravena, 2023; Menuey, 2005). Although elements such as class size, student demographics, curriculum, infrastructure, and resources are important, the quality of instruction is essential for achieving optimal student outcomes (Aravena 2023). Menuey (2005) emphasizes that the quality of teaching is crucial in education because teacher incompetence significantly affects students' learning outcomes. Furthermore, research shows that effective teachers significantly boost student achievement scores, while others have pointed out the notable differences between effective and ineffective teachers (Range et al., 2012).

Effective teachers not only facilitate the acquisition of knowledge and skills but also inspire confidence, critical thinking, and a lifelong love for learning (Menuey, 2005; Range et al. 2012). Additionally, school administrators, students, and parents recognize that teacher quality is essential for student achievement (Rockoff, 2004). Brophy (1986) suggests that research has shifted from examining teachers' traits to analyzing their teaching behaviors, and from assessing overall effectiveness to directly measuring student achievement. Moreover, educational research has concentrated on teacher behaviors that effectively promote student motivation (Skinner & Belmont, 1993). Given this profound impact, ensuring that all students have access to skilled, supportive educators is essential for fostering equitable and meaningful growth (Rangel et al., 2012). Conversely, underperforming teachers can hinder student progress, widening achievement gaps and limiting future opportunities.

R3. Execution and Monitoring of Teacher Support Plans

Teacher evaluation systems are essential tools for improving educational quality and fostering professional growth (Borremans & Spilt, 2022). In his seminal work, Castetter (1976) described teacher evaluation as a formal process carried out by administrators to assess instructional performance for the purpose of making employment-related decisions. Driven by strong federal incentives, many states have implemented procedures integrating student assessment data with comprehensive observation protocols (Hill & Grossman, 2013). The latest generation of teacher evaluation models typically adopts a standards-based framework for assessing teaching quality and integrates a value-added metric to measure student learning growth (Hallinger et al., 2014). Furthermore, there is a formative evaluation system designed to enhance teacher development, intending to help educators become more effective (Egelson, 1994). Numerous school districts have predominantly adopted a summative evaluation approach,

thereby prioritizing organizational objectives and goals over the professional development of teachers, and many other districts have opted for a formative approach grounded in clinical supervision (Shinkfield & Stufflebeam, 2012). These systems provide a structured framework for assessing teacher performance based on multiple measures, such as classroom observations, student achievement data, and professional contributions (Ing, 2010). Research shows informal and formal classroom observations are a specific behavior with the potential to influence instruction and learning (Ing, 2010). As stated by Ing (2010), it is essential to recognize that there is a logical connection between classroom observations and instructional leadership; specifically, when principals observe classroom instruction and offer feedback or take other actions, they assist teachers in refining their practices and growing professionally (Ing, 2010).

Moreover, as Danielson (2000) stated, it is essential to identify the relative importance of various criteria for both elementary and secondary teachers when defining effective teaching. Besides, it is crucial for educators to establish a set of shared values and assumptions that can guide the continued development of the system (Danielson, 2000). Recent research recognized the importance of general teaching skills in specific content areas, such as science, English, and math, however, most of the observation protocols selected in new teacher evaluation systems are generic concerning content areas and are designed to be used with all teachers (Hill & Grossman, 2013).

Research indicates that the majority of teachers in the United States are evaluated by an administrator or evaluator using a summative assessment system (Egelson, 1994). Two notable teacher competency taxonomies have been established in the United States through comprehensive logical task analyses conducted by principals, teachers, superintendents, and university educators are the primary frameworks are the Houston Needs Assessment System

(1973) and the Pennsylvania Competency-Based Teacher Education Program ([1971] Shinkfield & Stufflebeam, 2012). The Houston Needs Assessment System acknowledges certain skills, attitudes, and knowledge that teachers must demonstrate varying levels and it allows teachers to take the autonomy of their own professional growth (Shinkfield & Stufflebeam, 2012). On the other hand, the Pennsylvania program is more of an instrument for self-examination and development (Shinkfield & Stufflebeam, 2012).

The state of Texas fully implemented a new teacher evaluation method, the Texas Evaluation and Support System (T-TESS), during the 2016-2017 school year. Educators designed this system to support teachers' professional growth (T-TESS, 2022). One of the primary goals of T-TESS is to help teachers and provide specific, targeted feedback to improve their practice (T-TESS, 2022). In 2019, Texas implemented a merit pay model that empowers local school districts to submit plans to the state. This model enables teachers to earn various levels of incentive pay. To qualify for these distinctions, teachers must undergo mandatory evaluations as part of the Texas Teacher Evaluation and Support System (T-TESS, 2022). The state of Texas is emphasizing teacher evaluations to enhance academic achievement (T-TESS, 2022). By identifying strengths and areas for development, evaluation systems help ensure that teachers receive targeted feedback and support to enhance their instructional practices. Additionally, these evaluations promote accountability, aligning teacher performance with school goals and student outcomes.

Teacher Support/Support Plans and Their Validity

Identifying and supporting underperforming teachers is vital to maintaining the quality and equity of education within schools. Supporting and evaluating teaching performance constitute critical elements of effective instructional leadership practices (Ing, 2010). The

primary mechanism through which principals impact student achievement is by supporting teachers in enhancing their instructional practices, a process referred to as instructional leadership (Range et al., 2012). As stated by Hallinger et al. (2014) instructional supervision is defined as growth-oriented coaching carried out by administrators and this process involves observation and feedback aimed specifically at enhancing teacher capacity, a common practice in teaching. However, underperforming teachers demand too much of the principal's energy and time, which could be better focused on other instructional matters (Yariv, 2004).

Supporting underperforming teachers is essential for ensuring quality and equity in education within schools (Aravena, 2023). Teachers who struggle in their roles may unintentionally hinder student learning, contribute to disengagement, or fail to meet the diverse needs of their classrooms (Range et al., 2012). Thus, school administrators oversee classrooms by frequently visiting to collect data on performance, which they use to evaluate teachers summatively (Rangel et al., 2012). According to Tucker (2001), the improvement of the entire school environment is contingent upon the instructional leader's ability to assist each teacher in achieving success: yet principals may be tasked with a variety of responsibilities throughout the day, it is imperative that providing support to teachers who are struggling takes precedence.

Research indicates that the initial step in supporting teachers is to identify those who are in the greatest need (Slater, 2004). By proactively identifying these challenges, school administrators can implement targeted support and support plans to address specific areas of weakness, enhance professional capacity, and ultimately improve teaching effectiveness (Aravena, 2023; Yariv & Kass, 2017). Slater (2004) stated that when teachers underperform, school administrators must initiate the remediation process. This includes communicating expectations and improvement goals to the teacher, as well as monitoring progress toward these

goals (Slater, 2004). Teacher support plans are structured frameworks designed to provide targeted assistance to educators in improving their professional practices and achieving desired outcomes (Slater, 2004). Furthermore, the development of these plans typically involves collaboration between teachers, administrators, and instructional leaders, using data from classroom observations, self-assessments, and student performance metrics (Aravena, 2023; Slater, 2004; Stronge, 2002). Moreover, implementation includes clear timelines, actionable goals, and access to resources such as mentoring, professional development, and ongoing feedback (Slater, 2004). Research indicates that focusing on one goal at a time is essential (Slater, 2004). However, other studies suggested that working on three goals simultaneously is manageable (Davis, 1991).

Validity

Support plans are tailored to meet the varying needs of individual teachers. The validity of these plans depends on their alignment with teaching standards, responsiveness to individual needs, and measurable impact on both teacher effectiveness and student success (Aravena, 2023; Glickman, 2002; Slater, 2004). Therefore, regular monitoring and adjustments ensure the plan remains relevant and effective (Slater, 2004). Furthermore, research shows that the most common areas where teachers need support are: teaching methods, content knowledge, compliance with school and school district rules, teaching duties, low academic progress of students, classroom management, poor relationships with colleagues, parents, and students (Aravena, 2023; Range et al., 2012; Rhodes & Beinecke, 2011; Wragg et al., 2000).

Research shows that teachers encounter challenges at various points throughout their careers. For instance, Slater (2004) emphasizes the importance of providing support to first-year teachers and those new to a school. No teacher preparation program can fully equip novices for the realities they will face in the classroom or a new school environment (Slater, 2004). On the

other hand, Yariv & Kass (2017) focus on teachers who have more than five years of teaching experience and are still underperforming. By proactively identifying these challenges, school administrators can implement targeted support and support plans to address specific areas of weakness, enhance professional capacity, and ultimately improve teaching effectiveness.

Struggles with Interpretation of Data

When principals use frameworks or give information to teachers, how they view and apply that information is what ultimately will determine the success or failure of the endeavor. Research indicates that teachers often struggle with interpreting assessment data and their likelihood of using data in their decision-making is impacted by how confident they feel about their knowledge and skills related to the data set (Bailey et al., 2020). For principals, this means that supporting teachers with targeted training and ongoing guidance in data interpretation is essential to increase their confidence and ensure effective, data-informed instructional decisions. Additionally, Stewart and Jansky (2022) found that novice teachers commonly struggle to reconcile educational theory with standardized school practices and to manage relationships with veteran colleagues, particularly due to pacing pressures and institutional norms. For administrators, these findings highlight the need to design induction and professional development programs that directly address these context-specific challenges through structured reflection, mentorship, and relational support (Stewart & Jansky, 2022).

Sailor et al. (2021) highlighted that the Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) was an effective methodology for school administrators to execute and monitor teacher support plans. MTSS is a comprehensive, evidence-based, school-wide framework that integrates academic, behavioral, and social-emotional interventions across multiple levels to support the needs of all students. It helps administrators prepare teachers by providing a structured framework for

identifying student needs and delivering tiered interventions, enabling more effective instruction, collaboration, and data-driven decision-making (Sailor et al., 2021). MTSS supports teachers in better interpreting feedback and data by offering a clear, tiered structure that links student performance to specific interventions, making data more actionable and relevant to instructional decisions (Sailor et al., 2021). Additionally, Fallon et al. (2018) found that teachers who participated in self-assessment and training implemented behavior plans with high fidelity, especially when they received performance feedback from principals.

Professional Development for Administrators

Martinez and McAbee (2020) did a systematic review of what literature informs about the support school administrators provide to teachers and what it tells stakeholders about that role in retaining effective teachers. The results of this study highlighted that the following administrative efforts used independently or in combination helped support teachers: induction, mentoring, staffing support, course assignment changes, resource and professional development enhancement, increased autonomy, constructive evaluations, and support with challenging parents. This suggests that having administrators who are properly trained to provide such supports would be advantageous to school culture and performance. Despite this, professional development of experienced principals is a less studied phenomenon (Sahlin, 2023). According to Sahlin (2023), the most efficacious way of developing better administrators is through interactions with other professional peers. Combining research and practice-based learning and interactions with professional peers provided confidence to principals, which in turn increased their professionalism and value to teachers. Jensen (2023) similarly concluded that professional development of school leadership is positively impacted by peer partnerships across institutions. This aided in problem solving district-specific issues.

School-specific issues for administrative development have been noted by evidence. Brauckmann et al. (2020) found that principals are best served by context-sensitive school leadership preparation programs. This eschews more one-size-fits-all principal preparation programs in favor of ones that target specific considerations for their respective schools. Kaul et al. (2022) further concluded that principals rely on district guidance, particularly in times of crisis, to address school challenges. These facets have been noted by policy makers who are increasingly recognizing that school-level problems and challenges should be resolved on site. Brauckmann et al. (2020) used Sweden as an example of this where governing structures have introduced context-specific preparation programs for principals in their country. Overall, Sahlin (2023) substantiated earlier findings by Bush (2018), who concluded that principals need access to systematic, formal, professional learning at all stages of their career rather than just at the beginning. This highlights that professional development is a continuous career process rather than a destination.

Contribution of the Study

This study contributes to the existing body of research by offering a nuanced exploration of how school administrators navigate the complex process of developing and implementing support plans for underperforming teachers. While prior research has addressed teacher effectiveness and the role of instructional leadership, limited scholarship has captured how administrators manage the practical, emotional, and organizational tensions associated with supporting underperforming educators. This study adds a nuanced understanding of how differentiated support strategies like coaching, mentorship, and tailored professional development, are operationalized within real-world school settings.

This study sheds light on how administrators balance their instructional leadership duties with systemic challenges such as union protections, time constraints, and staff morale. By focusing on administrator perspectives, this research fills a critical gap in understanding how leadership practices influence both teacher growth and student outcomes. The study also offers practical implications for district leadership, policy reform, and professional development by identifying which elements of support plans lead to meaningful improvement. Ultimately, the findings can inform leadership preparation programs, guide school improvement initiatives, and provide evidence-based strategies for fostering teacher development in a way that is both empathetic and accountable to student achievement.

Summary

The pivotal role of a school principal within the school setting cannot be overstated. Other studies have found that they supervise teacher performance, support students, and foster a shared vision among teachers (Aravena, 2023; Range et al., 2012; Reid, 2021; Sahin, 2023). Furthermore, according to Sahin (2023), a school principal plays a vital role in maintaining the effective operation of the school and should continuously find strategies to inspire students to strive for excellence and foster a strong drive for personal growth and improvement. In addition, they manage the curriculum, oversee the school's day-to-day operations, provide professional development for teachers, secure resources, maintain the school's infrastructure, motivate teachers, and communicate with all stakeholders (Akbaba et al., M. 2021; Aravena, 2023; Range et al., 2012; Reid, 2021; Sahin, 2023). Furthermore, a school principal plays a vital role in maintaining the school's operations, and school administrators play a crucial role in guaranteeing the high quality of education in schools and supporting the professional development of both

teachers and students (Rangel et al., 2012; Sahin, 2023). Principals play a crucial role in creating a positive learning and working environment.

The line that separates competent teachers from incompetent ones is often ambiguous and influenced by subjective factors. While competency may be measured by a teacher's knowledge, classroom management, and ability to inspire students, these qualities can vary depending on context, student needs, and individual teaching styles (Aravena, 2023; Range et al., 2012; Wragg et al., 2000). A teacher who excels in one environment may struggle in another, making it difficult to define universal standards for competence (Rhodes & Beinecke, 2011). Ultimately, the distinction is shaped by a complex interplay of skills, adaptability, and the specific expectations of students, parents, and institutions (Aravena, 2023).

Policies can also affect access to education by addressing or neglecting barriers such as socioeconomic disparities, geographic location, and special needs accommodations. Teacher unions play a key role in negotiating salaries, benefits, and working conditions, which can impact teacher retention and morale (Washira, 2021). Furthermore, they often participate in political and policy discussions, pushing for reforms that benefit both teachers and the education system (Moe, 2001). However, critics argue that unions can sometimes resist changes aimed at accountability or innovation, creating debates about their overall impact on education.

Teachers who struggle in their roles may unintentionally hinder student learning, contribute to disengagement, or fail to meet the diverse needs of their classrooms. By proactively identifying these challenges, school administrators can implement targeted support and support plans to address specific areas of weakness, enhance professional capacity, and ultimately improve teaching effectiveness (Range et al., 2012; Wragg et al., 2000). Providing support not only benefits students but also helps teachers regain confidence and job satisfaction, creating a

positive ripple effect across the school community (Yariv & Kass, 2017). This process is essential for fostering a culture of accountability, continuous improvement, and educational excellence.

This chapter reviewed literature related to administrator perspectives on supporting underperforming teachers, the challenges of implementation, and the monitoring of support plans. Together, this body of research establishes the need for qualitative inquiry that captures both administrator perspectives and the formal structures that guide practice, supporting the use of interviews and document analysis in the present study, whose methodology is the focus in the next section, Chapter 3.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This research study was focused on understanding the development and impact of teacher support and growth plans for underperforming teachers with attention to the challenges, tensions, and possibilities from a school administrator's perspective. The preliminary research reviewed illustrated that school administrators can implement targeted support and support plans to address specific areas of weakness for underperforming teachers ultimately helping them improve teaching effectiveness (Range et al., 2012; Wragg et al., 2000). There are, however, ambiguities in identifying competencies among teachers (Aravena, 2023; Range et al., 2012; Wragg et al., 2000) that exist with other identified barriers that include resources, policy, unions, and other constructs. Teachers, as one of the most influential factors in student achievement, need to be operating at peak levels in order to facilitate the best educational environment (Range et al., 2012). The lived experiences of principals in the field hold the potential to contribute to a broader understanding of how well-designed, targeted interventions can positively impact teacher performance and create a more support and results-driven educational environment. Chapter 3 outlines the full scope of the research methodology that was used o investigate the study's central questions, detailing the design, participants, data collection, and analysis procedures (Creswell & Creswell, 2022). It ensured transparency and rigor by explaining how the research was conducted and how validity and reliability were maintained.

Research Design and Suitability

The conceptual framework for the study was adapted from social constructivism theory. Through this framework, school principals function as MKOs guiding teacher growth by highlighting areas for improvement, providing targeted feedback, and enabling access to resources and specialized learning opportunities (Suryanto et al., 2024). To gain lived insights

from principals working in the field, the selected method of inquiry was an interpretive qualitative study. This approach prioritizes participants' viewpoints and the contextual meaning they assign to their actions and decisions, rather than relying on objective or numerical measurements (Creswell & Creswell, 2022). A qualitative design was selected to capture the complexity of how administrators support underperforming teachers, allowing for rich, in-depth accounts of their challenges, strategies, and reflections. As Bhattacharya (2017) and Butin (2010) note, qualitative inquiry is especially valuable for examining relational dynamics and contextual influences that shape leadership practices.

Other research methods were considered before selecting an interpretive qualitative approach. A quantitative design was initially explored but deemed insufficient for capturing the depth and nuance of administrators' personal experiences and the complex decision-making involved in supporting underperforming teachers. Quantitative research designs often rely on standardized instruments and numerical data, which can overlook the contextual and emotional dimensions of human experience. While useful for measuring trends or testing hypotheses, they may fail to capture the depth, complexity, and subjective meanings behind participants' actions and decisions (Creswell & Creswell, 2022). For this study, the quantitative design was too rigid of a framework that would not allow for the nuances necessary to understand the perspectives of administrators as it pertains to aiding underperforming teachers.

A mixed methods approach was also considered due to it having the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative research (Creswell & Creswell, 2022). Ultimately, it was determined that the addition of quantitative data collection was unnecessary for the study's purpose and would have diluted the focus on lived experience. Beyond this, case study methodology was reviewed. Case studies are particularly advantageous when studying real-life situations within

their natural settings and when the research questions require a deep exploration of “how” and “why” processes occur (Bloomberg, 2023). Ultimately, this method was rejected because the aim was not to explore a bounded system or specific school context, but rather to understand broader patterns across administrators. Given the emphasis on meaning-making and individual perspective, interpretive qualitative research provided the most appropriate and focused methodological fit.

To explore this topic, the study employed an interpretative qualitative approach, allowing for a rich and in-depth examination of administrators’ perspectives on the development, implementation, and execution of support plans for underperforming teachers. The qualitative design enables the researcher to investigate the complex realities administrators face in their instructional leadership roles, capturing their thought processes, decision-making practices, and the contextual variables that shape their actions (Bhattacharya, 2017; Butin, 2010; Efrat & Ravid, 2019). By centering the voices of administrators, the research seeks to understand how they identify underperforming teachers, assess individual needs, and determine appropriate interventions such as mentorship, coaching, or professional development (Aravena, 2023; Yariv & Kass, 2019). This approach provides a holistic lens through which to explore the multifaceted nature of educational leadership and the nuanced strategies used to foster instructional improvement within diverse school contexts.

To accomplish the interpretive qualitative study, one-on-one, semi-structured interviews were used to explore the lived experiences of school administrators as they design and implement support plans for underperforming teachers. Semi-structured interviews are generally regarded to have more potential than other types of interviews because they allow researchers to gain a depth of information and data from participants while seriously considering the focus of

the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2022; Ruslin et al., 2022). This method is distinct from the looseness of an unstructured interview, and it can be controlled for better transferability (Ruslin et al., 2022). Interviews are based on conversations between two people. Through this particular mode of interaction, individuals can know other people, learning about their experiences, feelings, and hopes, gaining a better understanding about the worlds in which they live (Ruslin et al., 2022). Overall, the interviews explored how administrators navigate interpersonal dynamics, manage resistance to feedback, and sustain morale through the support process. This methodological approach aimed to uncover actionable insights that can inform leadership practice and strengthen systems for improving instructional performance and student outcomes.

Purpose of the Research and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to explore administrator perspectives on the design and implementation of support and growth plans for underperforming teachers, with particular attention to the challenges, tensions, and opportunities for teacher development. To accomplish this, the following guiding research questions were established:

1. What do administrators describe as important features or components of support plans for underperforming teachers?
2. What are the challenges and tensions administrators experience when developing and implementing teacher support plans?
3. How do school administrators execute and monitor teacher support plans to promote teacher growth and improved instructional practices?

Participants and Sample

The sample for this study consisted of 10 school administrators, specifically principals and assistant principals, from a single large school district located in the southern United States.

This rate of participants was appropriate for qualitative research, as it allowed for rich, in-depth exploration of lived experiences while maintaining manageable data for detailed analysis. Some research states that data saturation can occur with a small number of interviews, particularly in homogenous populations (Creswell & Creswell, 2022; Guest et al., 2006). Creswell and Creswell (2022) suggested that data saturation could be reached in a small purposefully selected sample in interpretive qualitative research with as few as 5 to 10 participants. However, the general consensus suggests 9-17 interviews for achieving saturation (Ahmed, 2025; Guest et al., 2006; Rahimi & Khatooni, 2024). Setting the number for this study at 9 to 11 stayed within this consensus, making this sample size sufficient for generating meaningful insights.

Participants were selected using purposive sampling, as this approach ensured the inclusion of individuals who possess the specific expertise required to address the research questions (Stratton, 2024). This sample method, however, can introduce selection bias and limit generalizability, as the findings may not reflect broader populations (Stratton, 2024). To mitigate the limitations of purposive sampling in this study, I enhanced credibility by selecting a diverse group of administrators within the targeted district. While generalizability is not the goal of interpretive qualitative research, transferability was supported through thick, detailed descriptions that allowed readers to assess relevance to their own contexts. Creswell and Creswell (2022) describe transferability as the extent to which findings from a qualitative study can be applied or extended into other settings. Rather than aiming for broad generalization, transferability relies on the researcher providing rich, detailed descriptions of the research context and participants, so that others can determine whether the results are applicable to their own situations (Creswell & Creswell, 2022; Creswell & Poth, 2024). All participants had to have at least ten years of experience in education, including experience creating and implementing

support plans, as well as prior experience with teacher evaluation and professional development. This criterion was designed to ensure that participants have the depth of experience necessary to offer valuable perspectives on supporting underperforming teachers.

Diversity was an intentional consideration during selection to include administrators from both elementary and secondary schools, as well as those representing different demographic and professional backgrounds. This approach strengthened the credibility of findings by incorporating a variety of viewpoints and experiences. Diversity is crucial for producing accurate, ethical, and generalizable findings (Chatters et al., 2024). Demographic information, that is non-identifiable in nature, was collected to help explore potential patterns across diverse backgrounds and professional contexts without revealing individual identities. This information included years of experience in education and in an administrative role, current school level, gender, and race/ethnicity. Participants were recruited via email invitations that outlined the purpose and scope of the study (Appendix C). Administrators who agreed to participate were provided with informed consent forms prior to being interviewed. The consent process emphasized voluntary participation, the confidentiality of responses, and the right to withdraw at any time. By focusing on experienced administrators with direct involvement in teacher evaluation and development, the study aimed to gather robust, context-rich data that reflects the complexities of implementing teacher support plans.

Data Collection, Processing, and Analysis

Data Collection

Data for this dissertation was collected using two qualitative methods: semi-structured interviews and document analysis as reported by the principals. Semi-structured interviews were conducted via Zoom, allowing for a flexible and convenient approach to gathering in-depth

insights from participants. Appendix A contains the predetermined interview questions used to guide the conversations while allowing flexibility for participants to elaborate on their experiences and perspectives. This interview format facilitated the collection of rich, detailed data by encouraging participants to share their views in an open-ended and conversational manner.

Interviews were planned to not exceed 60 minutes. Semi-structured interviews of approximately 60 minutes are commonly used in qualitative research because they provide sufficient depth to explore participants' perspectives while remaining manageable for both participants and researchers (Squire, 2024). A recent methodological review found that most qualitative interviews range between 30 and 90 minutes, with the majority lasting approximately 60 minutes, suggesting this duration supports rich data collection while remaining feasible to analyze (Squire, 2024). All interviews were audio recorded with participants' consent and transcribed verbatim for analysis (see Appendix C).

In addition to interviews, qualitative document analysis as reported by the principals focused specifically on teacher support and growth plans developed and implemented by participating administrators. These documents included anonymized teacher support plans that outlined identified areas of concern, targeted interventions, timelines, monitoring processes, and expectations for teacher growth. The teacher support plans were analyzed to examine how administrators formally documented support, structured accountability, and monitored progress over time. Document analysis as reported by the principals complemented interview data by providing concrete evidence of administrator practices and supported data triangulation, thereby enhancing the credibility of the study (Armstrong, 2021; Bowen, 2009; Creswell & Creswell, 2022).

Document Analysis Procedures

Qualitative document analysis was conducted to examine teacher support and growth plans developed and implemented by participating school administrators. Document analysis is a systematic qualitative method used to review and interpret written materials in order to elicit meaning, gain understanding, and support empirical inquiry (Armstrong, 2021; Bowen, 2009). In this study, teacher support plans were treated as central artifacts that reflected how administrators formally documented instructional concerns, structured support, and monitored teacher growth over time.

The documents analyzed consisted of anonymized teacher support and growth plans that included identified areas of concern, targeted interventions, timelines, monitoring strategies, and expectations for improvement. Documents were purposefully selected based on their direct relevance to the research questions and were reviewed multiple times to ensure familiarity with their content and context. During initial review, attention was given to the language used to describe teacher performance, the types of supports provided, and the mechanisms administrators used to balance support and accountability.

Following familiarization, which is Fereday and Muir-Cochrane's (2006) first step of a framework analysis, documents were coded using a thematic approach aligned with the study's conceptual framework grounded in social constructivism. Codes focused on elements such as scaffolding of teacher learning, administrator feedback and guidance, collaborative processes, and methods for monitoring progress. Themes emerging from the document analysis as reported by the principals were then compared with interview data to identify patterns of convergence and divergence. This integration of data sources strengthened analytic rigor through triangulation and

provided a more comprehensive understanding of how administrator-led teacher support plans are designed, implemented, and monitored in practice (Creswell & Creswell, 2022).

Data Processing

The method of transcription for the Zoom interviews was verbatim transcription using Otter.ai. This system integrates directly with Zoom (Sterne & Sawhney, 2022). This method allows for users to either upload the Zoom audio/video file afterward or enable live transcription during the session (if participants consent). The real-time live transcription method was employed for this study. Otter.ai generates a timestamped draft that can be manually reviewed and edited for accuracy, preserving the exact wording, pauses, and relevant non-verbal cues (e.g., laughter, sighs), as required in qualitative research (Otter.ai, 2025; Sterne & Sawhney, 2022). This is a widely employed method in qualitative research due to its efficiency, cost-effectiveness, and ability to produce transcriptions suitable for thematic analysis (Herdiyanti, 2024; Otter.ai, 2025). There are ethical concerns related to this method (Herdiyanti, 2024; Sterne & Sawhney, 2022). To remedy this, specific safeguards were put into place. First, the transcripts were sent to the participants for review to ensure credibility and accuracy. Additionally, transcripts were password-protected, coded by participant designations (e.g., Participant 1, Participant 2, etc.), and kept for 3 years on the researcher's hard drive. Three to 5 years is generally the amount of time for which data is stored before being destroyed (University of California, Berkely, 2025).

These materials and methods were designed to foster a respectful and ethical research process while ensuring the reliability and depth of the data collected. During the semi-structured interviews, I kept reflective notes to capture key observations, initial impressions, and any emerging themes that arise during the discussion. As I asked questions, I documented participants' reactions, tone, and any nonverbal cues that may provide additional context to their

responses. Burgoon et al. (2021) concluded that nonverbal behaviors color the meanings of interpersonal relationships and speak relational message of dominance, trust, and composure in qualitative research. These notes helped me analyze the data more thoroughly by allowing me to reflect on patterns, unexpected insights, and areas that may require further exploration. Keeping reflective notes also ensured that I remained engaged and responsive throughout the interviews while maintaining a detailed record of the research process.

Data Analysis

The data analysis process for this interpretive qualitative study followed a thematic analysis framework, guided by Braun and Clarke's (2021) six-phase approach. After transcription of the Zoom interviews using Otter.ai, all transcripts were manually reviewed and cleaned for accuracy, ensuring that verbal and nonverbal elements relevant to meaning making (such as pauses, tone, and emphasis) are preserved (Burgoon et al., 2021). The analysis was conducted using MAXQDA, a qualitative data analysis software well-suited for coding, organizing, and visualizing patterns in qualitative data (Adula et al., 2023; Alonso, 2021).

The interview transcripts were analyzed using a structured, multi-stage qualitative coding process aligned with the study's interpretive design and social constructivist framework. First, all interview transcripts were read in full to develop familiarity with each administrator's narrative, leadership context, and instructional environment. During this initial immersion, segments of text that reflected administrators' experiences with teacher support plans, instructional leadership, organizational constraints, and teacher growth were identified as meaning units (Saldaña, 2021)) (see Appendix D).

A first-cycle deductive coding process, as outlined by Bingham (2023), was then applied using the three research questions as analytic anchors. This ensured that all coded data directly

aligned with the purposes of the study and maintained coherence with the interview protocol. The coding process was structured along two complementary analytic dimensions. First, all meaning units (quotes of interview text that conveyed a single concept, experience, or observation relevant to the study) were coded deductively according to the study's three research questions to identify whether each segment of data addressed (a) the features and components of support plans, (b) the challenges and tensions of implementation, or (c) the execution and monitoring of support plans. Second, the same meaning units were simultaneously coded inductively for cross-cutting thematic patterns that described how these processes were experienced and enacted across contexts. Treating research questions and themes as separate but intersecting coding dimensions allowed the analysis to capture both what administrators were describing and the forces shaping those experiences.

Next, Bingham's (2023) second-cycle pattern coding process was used to examine relationships across the first-cycle codes (see Appendix D). Four cross-cutting themes emerged consistently across participants. These included standards alignment and clarity of expectations, coaching and layered instructional support, systemic constraints and organizational friction, and teacher mindset and perceptions of support. These themes were informed both by the conceptual framework grounded in social constructivism and by repeated patterns in administrator narratives, including references to instructional rubrics, modeling and mentoring, organizational barriers, and teacher engagement. Each coded segment was then entered into a cross-case analytic matrix that aligned the three research questions with the four cross-cutting themes (see Appendix D).

This matrix allowed for systematic comparison of administrator perspectives and made visible how each theme operated across different dimensions of leadership practice. Verbatim

excerpts were retained in each cell of the matrix and labeled by participant number to preserve confidentiality while ensuring transparency and traceability. This layered coding and matrix-based analysis provided a rigorous audit trail from raw data to findings, strengthening the credibility and dependability of the results while remaining grounded in participants' lived experiences. To further structure and systematize this analytic process, the study followed Braun and Clarke's (2021) six-phase framework for thematic analysis.

Phase 1: Familiarization with the Data. Transcripts were first read in their entirety to gain a holistic understanding of each participant's narrative.

Phase 2: Generating Initial Codes. Initial codes were then generated inductively to represent significant statements, phrases, or concepts related to administrators' experiences in identifying, supporting, and monitoring underperforming teachers. Data analysis incorporated both interview transcripts and document analysis as reported by the principals, allowing for direct comparison between administrators' described practices and the formal structures reflected in support plan artifacts. Interview data provided insight into administrator decision-making, perceptions, and relational dynamics, while document analysis revealed how support plans were formally structured, monitored, and operationalized in practice. This dual-source approach supported triangulation by aligning reported experiences with documented evidence of implementation. During this stage, interview transcripts were reviewed line-by-line, and recurring administrator language such as "documentation," "compliance," "coaching," and "resistance" was identified and coded. These initial codes reflected both procedural elements of support plans and relational dynamics between administrators and teachers. In parallel, document analysis as reported by the principals revealed consistent emphasis on timelines, monitoring logs, and standards alignment, which were coded as structural or accountability-oriented features.

These early patterns established a distinction between relational and procedural dimensions that informed subsequent categorization.

Phase 3: Searching for Categories. These codes were grouped into broader categories. For example, codes such as “documentation burden” and “policy compliance” were grouped into the category of accountability pressures, while codes such as “teacher resistance” and “relational trust” were grouped into relational categories.

Phase 4: Reviewing Themes. Through iterative review, key themes were developed to reflect recurring ideas and underlying meanings across the dataset. MAXQDA’s memo and visualization tools assisted in tracing connections between participants and thematic elements, supporting both cross-case analysis and the identification of divergent or nuanced responses (Alonso, 2021). Throughout the process, reflective memos and analytic journaling were maintained to ensure transparency, self-awareness, and alignment with the study’s constructivist framework. Reflective memos and analytic journaling are essential tools in qualitative research that help the researcher document evolving thoughts, question assumptions, and make transparent the interpretive process. These practices enhance analytic rigor by promoting reflexivity and deepening the connection between data and emerging themes (Lee et al., 2019; Olmos-Vega et al., 2022). For instance, categories related to accountability structures and monitoring practices were refined into the theme “systemic monitoring and documentation,” while relational categories informed themes reflecting implementation tensions and teacher response to support plans.

Phase 5: Defining and Naming Themes. This thematic analysis process aimed to construct a coherent, richly contextualized narrative of school administrators’ perspectives on teacher support plans, highlighting both shared challenges and varied leadership strategies within

different educational environments. Initial codes such as “time constraints,” “documentation burden,” and “policy compliance” were grouped into broader categories reflecting accountability pressures within the support plan process. Similarly, codes related to “teacher resistance,” “mindset,” and “relational trust” were clustered into relational categories that captured the interpersonal dimensions of implementation. Codes derived from document analysis as reported by the principals, including “standard alignment,” “monitoring frequency,” and “artifact requirements,” were categorized as structural supports. This stage refined the data by organizing discrete codes into meaningful groupings that represented patterns across both data sources.

Phase 6: Producing the Report. It should be noted that this interview analysis happened concurrently with document data analysis using thematic analysis. Interview transcripts and documents were coded using an inductive approach, allowing themes to emerge from the data while remaining informed by the conceptual framework. Document analysis as reported by the principals supported the interpretation of interview findings by providing concrete examples of administrator practices and formalized expectations. The integration of multiple data sources enabled the researcher to triangulate findings and enhance analytic depth. For example, themes such as “coaching and modeling” and “standard anchoring” were presented using both administrator interview excerpts and supporting document artifacts to illustrate how these practices were enacted in context.

This progression is illustrated in Table 3.1, which demonstrates how raw data were systematically transformed into codes, categories, and themes across both interview data and document analysis as reported by the principals.

Table 3.1*Example of Coding Progression from Raw Data to Themes*

Raw Data	Initial code	Category	Theme
Teachers push back when placed on support plans	Teacher resistance	Relational challenges	Implementation tensions
Time required to document every step of the plan	Documentation burden	Accountability pressures	Systemic monitoring and documentation
Weekly monitoring logs and required check-ins	Structured monitoring	Accountability	Systemic monitoring and documentation
Support plans aligned to district standards and evaluation tools	Standards alignment	Instructional structure	Standard anchoring
Administrators modeling lessons and providing coaching support	Instructional coaching	Developmental support	Coaching and modeling
Support plans included required artifacts and progress tracking forms	Artifact requirements	Structural supports	Systemic monitoring and documentation

Note. Raw data examples include both interview excerpts and document analysis as reported by the principals.

Following this systematic analysis process, specific strategies were employed to ensure the rigor and trustworthiness of the study's findings.

Trustworthiness of Study

To ensure the quality and rigor of this interpretive qualitative study, multiple strategies were used to address the core components of trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. These criteria, drawn from Lincoln and Guba's (1985) foundational framework and reinforced by Creswell and Poth (2024), reflect qualitative equivalents to validity and reliability in quantitative research. They are designed to support transparency, rigor, and confidence in the research findings while acknowledging the contextual and interpretive nature of qualitative inquiry. While some of these elements have been referenced in passing throughout this chapter, this section provides a comprehensive overview of the mechanisms in place to ensure the trustworthiness of this study.

Credibility

Credibility refers to the accuracy and plausibility of the findings from the perspective of the participants (Creswell & Poth, 2024). To enhance credibility, this study employed several key strategies. First, member checking was used by providing participants the opportunity to review their interview transcripts. This allowed them to clarify meaning, correct inaccuracies, and validate the authenticity of their responses. Additionally, reflective memoing occurred throughout the research process to capture evolving interpretations, potential biases, and analytic insights that emerge during data collection and analysis (Lee et al., 2019). Finally, credibility was enhanced through methodological triangulation by using both interviews and document

analysis. The inclusion of documents allowed the researcher to corroborate administrator perspectives and verify consistency between reported practices and documented procedures.

Peer Debriefing

Peer debriefing is a process where the researcher discusses their methods, findings, and interpretations with a knowledgeable peer to gain alternative perspectives and reduce potential bias (Creswell & Poth, 2024). I shared my preliminary findings and emerging themes with colleagues in educational leadership. These discussions helped challenge assumptions and provide external perspectives on the interpretation of data.

Transferability

Transferability refers to the extent to which the study's findings may apply to other contexts (Creswell & Poth, 2024). Unlike generalizability, transferability depends on the provision of rich, thick description that allows readers to make their own judgments about the relevance of the findings to their own setting (Creswell & Poth, 2024). This study included detailed accounts of participant demographics, school contexts, and professional backgrounds (without revealing identifiable information) to support nuanced understanding. Additionally, purposive sampling was selected to ensure participants brought relevant experience in teacher evaluation and support planning, while intentionally incorporating diversity in school level (elementary and secondary), gender, race/ethnicity, and years of service. This diversity of perspectives enhanced the study's potential resonance across varied educational environments.

Dependability

Dependability addresses the consistency and traceability of the research process (Creswell & Poth, 2024). An audit trail was maintained, documenting each step of the study from initial design through data analysis. This included interview protocols, transcribed data, coding

procedures, analytic memos, and changes to the research design, if any. MAXQDA software was used to code and organize data systematically, and coding strategies were reviewed and refined through iterative analysis. Themes were developed through Braun and Clarke's (2021) six-phase framework, and peer review of selected transcripts would further support the dependability of coding decisions. While triangulation of data types (e.g. observations, documents) was not used in this study, triangulation across participants allowed for comparison of perspectives and thematic saturation.

Confirmability

Confirmability refers to the degree to which the findings are shaped by the participants' experiences rather than researcher bias (Creswell & Poth, 2024). To address this, self-reflexivity was practiced throughout the research. A field journal was maintained to record methodological decisions, emotional responses, assumptions, and potential biases as they emerged during the study. Reflexivity is the process by which researchers critically explore their own role and influence on the research, acknowledging how positionally and worldview may shape interpretation (Creswell & Poth, 2024). To further promote objectivity, a confirmability audit was conducted with a qualified peer to review coding structures, theme development, and correspondence between the data and findings. Additionally, literature was used as a dialogic partner in the analysis phase to compare themes in the study with established research, identifying alignment or divergence from prior work (Sullivan, 2012). Finally, document analysis as reported by the principals contributed to confirmability by providing an audit trail of artifacts that supported analytic interpretations and reduced reliance on a single data source.

Assumptions

Certain assumptions were inherent to this qualitative study, and I addressed them with care throughout the research process. Individual interview transcripts served as the primary data source, with a total of 9 to 11 school administrators participating. This sample size is consistent with interpretive qualitative research and provided sufficient depth for meaningful thematic analysis (Ahmed, 2025; Creswell & Creswell, 2022; Creswell & Poth, 2024; Guest et al., 2006; Rahimi & Khatooni, 2024).

An important assumption was that participants would be honest and forthcoming in their responses. Any withholding of information or response bias, such as framing answers in socially desirable ways, could affect the integrity of the findings. To mitigate this, I prioritized building rapport and trust during interviews, creating a conversational environment where participants feel comfortable sharing candidly. I also remained attentive to patterns of consistency and divergence across interviews that may signal underlying gaps or contradictions in the data. To further support credibility, each participant was given the opportunity to review their transcript following the interview. This member checking process allowed participants to clarify or correct any inaccuracies, ensuring that their perspectives are authentically represented. These combined efforts helped uphold the trustworthiness and integrity of the research findings.

Limitations and Delimitations

As with all qualitative research, this study carried certain inherent limitations. First, the use of a small, purposively selected sample limited the ability to generalize findings to a broader population. While qualitative research does not seek statistical generalizability (Creswell & Creswell, 2022; Creswell & Poth, 2024), the insights gained are context-specific and may not reflect the full range of experiences across all school districts or administrator roles. The

participants' perspectives were inevitably shaped by their unique school environments, local policies, and professional philosophies, which may not be representative of other settings. Second, the study was conducted by a single researcher, who is also an education professional. While this professional background enhanced contextual awareness and rapport with participants, it also introduced the potential for researcher bias in data collection, analysis, and interpretation.

As the primary research instrument, I was responsible for conducting interviews, coding data, and drawing conclusions. All of these elements required careful attention to reflexivity. Reflexivity reflects the ongoing process by which researchers critically explore how their own background, assumptions, and positionality influence every stage of the research, from data collection to interpretation (Creswell & Poth, 2024). Despite my efforts to remain objective, my interpretations may have been influenced by my own values, assumptions, and prior experiences in the field. To mitigate this risk, multiple strategies were employed, including the use of analytic memo writing, member checking, and peer debriefing with colleagues in education. I also maintained reflective field notes throughout the research process to enhance transparency and promote analytic rigor (Lee et al., 2019; Olmos-Vega et al., 2022). Lastly, the reliance on self-reported data from interviews presented challenges in terms of accuracy and completeness, as responses are shaped by memory, perception, and participants' willingness to disclose sensitive information (Creswell & Creswell, 2022). While semi-structured interviews encourage openness, participants may still withhold or frame information in socially desirable ways (Patton, 2015).

This study has also been shaped by deliberate delimitations that narrow its scope in order to ensure depth and manageability. First, the research focuses exclusively on public K-12 school administrators (principals and assistant principals) with at least 10 years of educational

experience and experience creating and implementing support plans, as well as experience in teacher evaluation and professional development. This decision was made to ensure that participants bring a depth of professional insight relevant to the research questions. Second, the study was confined to a single, large school district located in the southern United States. This geographic limitation allowed for a focused investigation within a specific organizational and policy context but may have restricted the applicability of the findings to other districts with different demographics, resources, or governance structures. While this narrowed scope supported depth and coherence, it inherently limited the diversity of school contexts explored.

Third, this study did not explore novice teacher induction programs, non-instructional staff development, or district-level policymaking beyond its influence on campus-level implementation of teacher support plans. The focus was specifically on how school administrators identify, support, and monitor experienced teachers struggling with instructional performance. These boundaries were established to provide a concentrated lens on a complex and under explored area of instructional leadership. By setting these parameters, the study aimed to contribute meaningful insights into a specific yet critical aspect of school leadership, while acknowledging that broader systemic or cross-regional conclusions fall outside of its intended scope.

Ethical Assurances

This study adhered to strict ethical guidelines to ensure the integrity of the research process and the protection of all participants. Before any data was collected, the study gained approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) to ensure compliance with ethical standards. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and every effort was made to prevent and avoid unethical activities, including the violation of non-disclosure agreements. The name of the

school district remained undisclosed, and no personal identifiers associated with participants were attached to the research. Defined roles in the proposed study were clearly outlined to establish appropriate boundaries, and these roles were validated using an informed consent form.

Prior to conducting interviews, I articulated the purpose of the study and its expected outcomes to each participant, emphasizing the confidentiality and anonymity that will guide my research. At the conclusion of each interview, I assured participants that their responses would be shared with them for review, giving them the opportunity to validate their input and identify any inconsistencies. Throughout the data collection, transcription, and thematic analysis phases, I remained objective and diligent to ensure the accuracy and credibility of the findings. To safeguard the privacy and confidentiality of participants, all research materials were securely stored and would be destroyed after five years. These measures upheld ethical research practices, protected the individuals involved, and ensured the study adheres to a sound scientific process.

Ethical considerations for document analysis as reported by the principals included ensuring confidentiality and anonymity of all documents. Any identifying information related to teachers, students, schools, or districts was removed prior to analysis. Documents were used solely for research purposes and securely stored in accordance with institutional review board (IRB) requirements.

Summary

Chapter 3 provided a detailed overview of the research design and methodology for this interpretive qualitative study examining how school administrators develop and implement support and growth plans for underperforming teachers. Grounded in a social constructivist framework, the study utilized semi-structured interviews to explore the lived experiences of 9 to 11 experienced administrators within a large, southern U.S. school district. Further, document

analysis as reported by the principals was utilized. The chapter justified the choice of interpretive qualitative inquiry over other methodologies and outlined strategies to ensure trustworthiness, including member checks, reflexive journaling, and peer debriefing. Sampling procedures, participant criteria, data collection tools, and thematic analysis protocols were also described to ensure transparency and methodological rigor. Ethical safeguards were established to protect participant confidentiality and maintain research integrity.

Limitations, such as the context-bound nature of qualitative findings and the potential for researcher bias, were acknowledged alongside delimitations, designed to maintain a focused scope. Trustworthiness strategies addressed credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability in alignment with established qualitative research standards. Chapter 4 will present the results of the study, including thematic findings supported by direct participant quotations and interpretive analysis that highlight patterns, challenges, and tension in administrator-led teacher supports. These results will serve as the foundation for the discussion in Chapter 5.

Chapter 4: Findings

Chapter 4 presents the findings of this qualitative study, exploring administrators' perspectives on the design, implementation, and monitoring of teacher support plans for underperforming teachers. The purpose of this chapter is to analyze how school administrators understand and enact these plans, with a focus on the features they consider essential, the challenges and tensions they encounter, and the opportunities support plans create for teacher development and instructional improvement. By centering the administrative perspective, this chapter underscores the complex decision-making processes administrators undertake as they strive to balance accountability, professional growth, and student learning outcomes.

Guided by sociocultural theory and the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (Vygotsky, 1978), the findings highlight how administrators view support as a scaffolded process designed to advance teachers toward greater instructional competence. This chapter is organized according to the study's three research questions:

1. What do administrators describe as important features or components of support plans for underperforming teachers?
2. What are the challenges and tensions administrators experience when developing and implementing teacher support plans?
3. How do school administrators execute and monitor teacher support plans to promote teacher growth and improved instructional practices?

Using thematic analysis of participant data, this chapter presents patterns, themes, and illustrative excerpts that convey administrators' lived experiences.

Description of the Data and Participants

The participants in this study consisted of principals and assistant principals employed in an urban school district in the southern United States. Ten campus-level administrators participated in this study and were interviewed using semi-structured, open-ended interviews lasting approximately 30 minutes each. Participants were selected based on their experience in creating and implementing teacher support plans. All participants were currently serving in administrative roles at either the elementary or secondary level at the time of the study.

Participants' experience as campus-level administrators ranged from 1-10 years, while their total years of experience in education ranged from 13-31 years. To protect participant confidentiality, pseudonyms were assigned to all participants, and no identifying information related to schools or districts is included. Numbered pseudonyms (Participant 1, Participant 2, etc.) were used rather than name-based pseudonyms to maintain an additional layer of anonymity, given the small size of the district and the potential identifiability of administrators in specific roles. This approach aligned with IRB protocols and reduced the risk of inadvertent identification through contextual details that might emerge when combined with demographic descriptors. A summary of participant roles and professional experience is presented in Table 4.1, which provides an overview of each participant's administrative role and years of experience in education.

Table 4.1

Participant Overview Matrix

Participant Overview Matrix			
Pseudonym	Role	Years as Administrator	Total Years in Education

Participant 1	Elementary Principal	12	20
Participant 2	Elementary Principal	9	15
Participant 3	Elementary Principal	10	25
Participant 4	Elementary Principal	11.5	21
Participant 5	Elementary Principal	8	15
Participant 6	Elementary Assistant Principal	3	17
Participant 7	Elementary Assistant Principal	2	12
Participant 8	Secondary Assistant Principal	2	18
Participant 9	Elementary Principal	10	22
Participant 10	Secondary Principal	15	30

Data Sources

The data for this study were collected using qualitative sources to provide a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. The primary data source consisted of semi structured interviews conducted with each participant. Interviews focused on principals' and assistant principals' experiences developing and implementing teacher support plans and lasted approximately 30 minutes each.

While interviews served as the primary data source, teacher support plans were also analyzed to supplement and contextualize participants' narratives. The review of these documents offered an additional perspective on the structures and components of teacher support planning. All documents were reviewed after the removal of any identifiable information to maintain confidentiality. These documents were used to support and provide additional content for the interview data.

All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Data were stored securely and organized for analysis following the procedures outlined in Chapter 3. Together, these data sources contributed to a detailed examination of participants' experiences with teacher support planning.

Findings by Research Question

This chapter presents the findings of the study organized by the three research questions and informed by thematic analysis of interviews with ten campus administrators. The findings reflect administrators' perceptions, experiences, and practices related to the development, implementation, and monitoring of teacher support plans. To provide a coherent analytic structure, results are organized across four cross-cutting themes that consistently emerged in the data: (a) standards alignment and clarity of expectations; (b) coaching, modeling, and layered instructional support; (c) systemic constraints and organizational friction; and (d) teacher mindset, buy-in, and perceptions of support. While each research question highlights a distinct aspect of support plan use, design, challenges, and execution, these themes recur across the participants' responses to the interview questions and illustrate the interconnected nature of instructional leadership, organizational systems, and teacher capacity-building. Presenting findings by research question allows for a nuanced examination of how these themes manifest across stages of the support plan process, while also revealing patterns of convergence and tension among administrators' practices and beliefs.

Analysis of Findings by Research Question

This section presents the findings of the study organized by three research questions and structured through cross-case thematic analysis of administrator interviews. To ensure analytic coherence, each excerpt of interview data was coded along two dimensions. These were the

research question it addressed and the cross-cutting theme in which it reflected. This approach made it possible to examine not only what administrators described at different stages of the support-plan process, but also the forces that shaped those respective experiences across contexts. As previously articulated, across the three research questions, four cross-cutting themes consistently occurred. These included standards alignment and clarity of expectations, coaching, modeling, and layered instructional support, systemic constraints and organizational friction, and teacher mindset, buy-in, and perceptions of support. These themes did not operate independently within any single state of support-plan use; instead, they recurred across the design, implementation, and monitoring of support plans, thereby shaping administrators’ decision-making and instructional leadership practices in different ways.

Table 4.2 presents a cross-case analytic matrix that maps the three-research question against the four cross-cutting themes. The matrix illustrates how each theme manifested within each research question and provides representative verbatim excerpts labeled by participant number. These quotations serve as exemplars of the broader themes expressed. The following is an analytical overview of the dataset and establishes the structure for the findings that follow.

Table 4.2

Research Question Theme Analytic Matrix

Research Questions	Theme A Standards	Theme B Coaching	Theme C Systemic	Theme D Mindset
RQ1 Components	Participant 4: “I go off the t-test rubric. So, the areas that... we yield the highest impact	Participant 1: “Sometimes that we’re like, no, we gotta hustle and move because	Participant 4: “The hardest thing is... trying to not make it... where there’s too much paperwork... or it	Participant 5: “I feel like I have narrowed it down to one thing on the success or the

	are the dimensions that we focus on. So, a support plan could be focused on t-test dimension 2.1, achieving student expectations. And then we would break down what that would look like in the classroom.”	we don’t have the time. So, we... go in there and model... co-teach... a lot of times modeling for the teachers, how to best do it... And then finding those mentors that they can also... go to for support as well.”	requires a lot of... professional development outside of being in the classroom... so thinking of how can I help this teacher grow within the school day, within the time that we have.”	lack of success of any plan, and that’s the teacher’s mindset... whenever there’s defensiveness... that’s what we have seen that has led to lack of success.”
RQ2 Challenges	Participant 1: “If we are going into the classroom and we’re saying that they’re proficient or above our t-test, but the data doesn’t reflect it, then we are missing something... if I’m seeing a	Participant 3: “The strategy that works the best is when I... request my coaches... especially from the district, to come and model a lesson for the teacher... that’s when I see the	Participant 3: “It’s difficult... you have to be extremely bad... for me to put an action plan.”	Participant 4: “Upset. Yes... it hasn’t been a surprise... we’ve had coaching conversations... so when it gets to that point it’s not a surprise.”

	teacher's proficient but the data's not growing, then I'm not seeing something."	most improvement."		
RQ3 Execution	Participant 3: "The rubric... the rubric is the Bible for me... and the effectiveness is also based on the data, on the students' growth... matching goals in the action plan with the future observation."	Participant 3: "We line up things that we can do... visiting other classrooms, doing coaching conversations... working with peers, PLCs... professional development."	Participant 7: "[I utilize] the preponderance of evidence seen and heard...Timestamped document that has teacher actions and student actions to script the evidence throughout walkthroughs and evaluations. Triangulating the data of observations, student performance, and teachers lesson internalizations help validate the findings. In addition, I calibrate with the leadership team to ensure consistency through observation."	Participant 10: "You do get a bit more pushback from your veteran teachers... they've done something that way for so long that you're trying to break... change is often hard for many people."

The sections that follow then examine each research questions in turn, using the four themes as an organizing lens to describe how administrators understand, experience, and enact teacher support plans in practice.

Research Question 1: What Do Administrators Describe as Important Features or Components of Support Plans for Underperforming Teachers?

Administrators consistently described support plans as structured, multi-dimensional tools designed to guide teacher improvement through clear expectations, targeted instructional support, and ongoing monitoring. Across participants, four interconnected themes emerged: standards alignment and clarity of expectations, coaching and layered instructional support, systemic constraints, and teacher mindset and buy-in. While these themes reflect distinct aspects of support plan design, they also illustrate how instructional expectations, relational support, organizational conditions, and teacher dispositions collectively shape the effectiveness of support plans. Together, these findings suggest that support plans function not only as accountability mechanisms but also as dynamic frameworks for instructional growth, contingent on both structural clarity and relational engagement. Table 4.3 provides a summary of the key themes associated with Research Question 1, including their descriptions, representative examples, and the frequency with which they were reflected across participant responses.

Table 4.3

Summary of Themes for Research Question 1

Theme	Description	Example	Frequency
Standards Alignment and Clarity of Expectations	Support plans are anchored in formal evaluation frameworks and clearly defined instructional criteria, translating standards into specific,	“The plan outlines clear directives, timelines, and measurable goals.” (Participant 7)	All participants

	measurable expectations for teacher improvement.		
Coaching, Modeling, and Layered Instructional Support	Administrators emphasized direct, hands-on instructional support through modeling, co-teaching, and collaboration with coaches and peers.	“We go in there and model... co-teach... showing them how to do it.” (Participant 1)	Most participants
Systemic Constraints and Organizational Friction	Time limitations, competing responsibilities, and external pressures constrain the consistency and depth of support plan implementation.	“There’s only 8 hours in the day... it’s really hard to stay consistent.” (Participant 1)	Many participants
Teacher Mindset, Buy-in, and Perceptions of Support	Teacher openness, defensiveness, and self-awareness influence how support plans are received and whether they lead to meaningful change.	“The success... comes down to the teacher’s mindset.” (Participant 5)	Most participants

Note. Frequency categories reflect qualitative patterns across participant responses.

Standards Alignment and Clarity of Expectations

For research question 1, the selected exemplar quotation related to standards alignment and clarity of expectations came from Participant 4 who stated, “I go off the T-TESS rubric. So, the areas that...we yield the highest impact are the dimensions that we focus on. So, a support plan could be focused on T-TESS dimension 2.1, achieving student expectations. And then we would break down what that would look like in the classroom.” Additionally, Participant 7 explained “...the process begins with identifying specific areas of improvement aligned to T-TESS domains, such as achieving expectations, classroom environment, and differentiation. The plan outlines clear directives, timelines, and measurable goals.” Similarly, Participant 10 stated, “One, if you identify the need, that’s going to be impactful, because they need to know exactly what they’re doing wrong, or that they’re not understanding, or it’s not coming through. So, what are your actual action steps that you’re going to take to correct this... they need to know what exactly it is, what am I asking for, the expectations, and then how are we going to fix this.”

There was very little change concerning RQ1 Theme A. The administrators were strikingly aligned. Across participants, descriptions of support plans consistently emphasized the role of formal evaluation frameworks and explicit instructional criteria in defining what teachers were expected to improve upon. Participant 7 described support plans as being organized around “clear directives, timelines, and measurable goals,” with attention to both instructional delivery and classroom structures. Participant 10 similarly focused on the importance of teachers knowing “exactly what it is” they are being asked to change and what specific steps would be used to address identified needs. References to standards, rubrics, and data were frequently paired with discussion of how expectations were communicated to teachers, suggesting that support plans were designed to translate evaluation language into concrete instructional targets. Participants

also described using walkthroughs, student work, and formal observations to monitor alignment between expectations and classroom practice. Together, these accounts illustrate that administrators framed support plans as structured, standards-based tools that specified both the focus of improvement and the criteria by which progress would be assessed.

Coaching, Modeling, and Layered Instructional Support

For research question 1, the selected exemplar quotation related to coaching, modeling, and layered instructional support came from Participant 1. Participant 1 stated, “Sometimes that we’re like, no, we gotta hustle and move because we don’t have the time. So, we... go in there and model... co-teach... a lot of times modeling for the teachers, how to best do it... And then finding those mentors that they can also... go to for support as well.” Participant 2 stated, “The instructional coach is going to do a lot of training...she’s gonna do a lot of the co-teaching.” Participant 3 expounded on this, “The strategy that works best is when I...request my coaches...especially from the district, to come and model a lesson for the teacher.” Participant 3 continued, “When they teach each other...they explain better and they understand better.” Furthermore, Participant 7 highlighted that support includes collaboration with instructional coaches.

Across participants, descriptions of coaching, modeling, and layered instructional support were highly consistent. Administrators repeatedly described support plans as involving direct instructional assistance rather than relying solely on written feedback or formal documentation. Participant 1 emphasized modeling, co-teaching, and connecting teachers with mentors, while Participant 2 highlighted the role of instructional coaches in providing training and co-teaching support. Participant 3 focused on the importance of district and campus coaches modeling lessons for teachers and described peer-to-peer learning as a valuable part of the support process.

Participant 7 similarly referenced collaboration with instructional coaches as part of the support structure. While participants differed in whether support was delivered primarily by campus-based coaches, district personnel, or peer teachers, there was broad agreement that effective support plans included multiple layers of instructional assistance. No participants described support plans as being limited to compliance tasks or isolated meetings; instead, they consistently referenced ongoing coaching, modeling, and collaborative learning opportunities as central features of teacher support.

Systemic Constraints and Organizational Friction

The selected exemplar quotation for RQ1 related to systemic constraints and organizational friction came from Participant 4, who stated, “The hardest thing is...trying to not make it... where there’s too much paperwork... or it requires a lot of...professional development outside of being in the classroom...so thinking of how can I help this teacher grow within the school day, within the time that we have.” Participant 1 and Participant 9 additionally supported this with references to time allotment. According to Participant 1, “There’s only 8 hours in the day that we have with the teachers... and with everything else that we have to do it’s really hard to...stay consistent to supporting the teacher ourselves.” Participant 9 further stated, “Timelines... the time in which... the teacher may not have sufficient time...to get the professional development or the support needed... because of everything that happens in a school setting day in and day out.” Beyond limited time frames, Participant 8 referenced outside influences and stated, “Outside influences...you maybe have other people who want to... call the union... and that kind of helps kind of put a stop on it.”

Across participants, there was strong convergence around time as a primary constraint shaping the development of support plans. Multiple administrators described limited

instructional time, competing responsibilities, and compressed timelines as obstacles to sustained coaching and follow-up. Participant 4 focused on minimizing paperwork and avoiding professional development that pulls teachers away from classrooms, while Participant 1 and Participant 9 emphasized the difficulty of maintaining consistent support within the constraints of the school day. Participant 8 added a different dimension by referencing outside influences, including union involvement, that can interrupt or delay the implementation of support plans. Although participants varied in the specific types of barriers they described, none suggested that support plans could be implemented without organizational constraints. Instead, time, procedural requirements, and external pressures were consistently presented as factors that complicated how support plans were designed and carried out. These accounts illustrate that systemic conditions shaped the practical boundaries within which administrators attempted to support underperforming teachers.

Teacher Mindset, Buy-in, and Perceptions of Support

The final theme, teacher mindset, buy-in, and perceptions of support that relate to RQ1 came from Participant 5. Participant 5 explained, “I feel like I have narrowed it down to one thing on the success or the lack of success of any plan, and that’s the teacher’s mindset... whenever there’s defensiveness...that’s what we have seen that has led to lack of success.” Participant 10 noted that teacher mindset can be influenced by the number of years teaching. Participant 10 explained, “You do get a bit more pushback from your veteran teachers...they’ve done something that way for so long that you’re trying to break...change is often hard for many people.” Participant 6, however, noted the need for self-evaluation among teachers. Participant 6 explained, “If they can’t identify their own weaknesses, then that also

further shifts that conversation.” These responses speak directly to teacher openness, resistance, and self-awareness as conditions shaping how support plans function.

Across participants, teacher mindset was consistently described as a central factor shaping whether support plans were experienced as opportunities for growth or as sources of resistance. Participant 5 emphasized that defensiveness often limited the effectiveness of even well-designed plans, while Participant 10 highlighted how years of experience influenced openness to change. Veteran teachers were described as more likely to push back when asked to alter established routines or instructional practices. Participant 6 similarly pointed to teachers’ ability to recognize their own areas of need as an important part of the process, noting that when teachers could not identify weaknesses, the nature of support conversations changed.

Although participants agreed that teacher disposition mattered, they described different expressions of this challenge. Some administrators focused on emotional reactions such as defensiveness or reluctance, while others emphasized cognitive awareness, such as teachers’ capacity to self-evaluate. Together, these responses indicate that mindset was not a single, uniform trait but included a range of attitudes, from resistance to reflection. No participant suggested that teacher buy-in was irrelevant to support plan success. Instead, administrators consistently referenced teacher beliefs, openness, and self-perception as factors that influenced how support plans were received and enacted within the classroom.

Research Question 2: What are The Challenges and Tensions Administrators Experience

When Developing and Implementing Teacher Support Plans?

Administrators described the challenges and tensions associated with developing and implementing support plans as multifaceted and shaped by both instructional and organizational factors. Across participants, four recurring themes emerged: tensions in aligning evaluation data

with instructional outcomes, the role of coaching and instructional support in addressing performance concerns, systemic constraints that limit implementation, and the influence of teacher mindset and buy-in. While these themes represent distinct areas of challenge, they also illustrate how instructional decision-making, organizational conditions, and teacher perceptions interact to shape the complexity of support plan implementation. Collectively, these findings suggest that challenges are not isolated to a single dimension of practice but emerge from the interplay between expectations, support structures, and contextual constraints. Table 4.4 provides a summary of the key themes associated with Research Question 2, including their descriptions, representative examples, and the frequency with which they were reflected across participant responses.

Table 4.4

Summary of Themes for Research Question 2

Theme	Description	Example	Frequency
Standards Alignment and Clarity of Expectations	Administrators described tensions between formal evaluation ratings and student performance data, requiring multiple sources of evidence to accurately assess instructional effectiveness.	“If I’m seeing a teacher is proficient but the data’s not growing, then I’m not seeing something.” (Participant 1)	Most participants

Coaching, Modeling, and Layered Instructional Support	Coaching and modeling were consistently used to address performance challenges, often occurring prior to or alongside formal support plans.	“The strategy that works the best is when I...request my coaches...to come and model a lesson.” (Participant 3)	All participants
Systemic Constraints and Organizational Friction	Time constraints, procedural requirements, and external influences limited the consistency and depth of support plan implementation.	“Time is definitely an obstacle...you have to be very detailed...very careful.” (Participant 2)	Many participants
Teacher Mindset, Buy-in, and Perceptions of Support	Teacher openness, prior communication, and self-awareness shaped how support plans were received and whether challenges could be effectively addressed.	“If they don’t see that there’s a problem...they’re not going to be willing to grow.” (Participant 6)	All participants

Note. Frequency categories reflect qualitative patterns across participant responses.

Standards Alignment and Clarity of Expectations

The selected exemplar quotation related to R2 standards alignment and the clarity expectations’ theme came from Participant 1. Participant 1 stated

If we are going into the classroom and we're saying that they're proficient or above our T-TESS, but the data doesn't reflect it, then we are missing something...if I'm seeing a teacher is proficient but the data's not growing, then I'm not seeing something.

Similarly, Participant 3 explained, "Sometimes...when you visit a classroom one or two times during a semester, the data probably is not gonna match." Participant 3 continued, "But when you are visiting the classrooms frequently...doing check-ins, walkthroughs, formal observations... you get like six, seven different observation points. Throughout the semester, you can see that the data speaks the truth." Participant 4 highlighted using the T-TESS rubric, doing walkthroughs, and seeing student work. Participant 7 also described using a combination of T-TESS domains, walkthrough evidence, and student performance data to validate whether a teacher's observed instructional practices were actually producing expected learning outcomes, rather than relying on a single observation or rating.

These quotations and paraphrases suggest that multiple administrators described tension between formal ratings and empirical evidence and relied on rubrics, repeated observations, and student work to resolve those discrepancies. Across participants, there was strong symmetry in how administrators described the relationship between evaluation ratings and student performance data. Multiple administrators indicated that single observations or isolated ratings were not sufficient to determine instructional effectiveness, and that repeated walkthroughs, formal observations, and review of student work were necessary to confirm whether classroom practice aligned with expected standards. Participant 1 and Participant 3 both emphasized discrepancies that can emerge between rubric scores and student growth, while Participant 4 and Participant 7 focused on the use of multiple evidence sources, including T-TESS domains and student performance, to validate instructional quality. Although participants varied in the specific

tools they emphasized, there was no disagreement about the need to triangulate observation data with student outcomes. No administrator described relying solely on one measure to make decisions about teacher support.

Coaching, Modeling, and Layered Instructional Support

Coaching, modeling, and layered instructional support relating to RQ2 were highlighted by respondents and illustrated through an exemplar quotation selected from Participant 3's responses. Participant 3 highlighted that "The strategy that works the best is when I...request my coaches...especially from the district, to come and model a lesson for the teacher...that's when I see the most improvement." Participant 10 further explained, "First of all, we start off with...just giving coaching conversations...let's go through the lesson...what is your lesson objective, and how are we getting the mastery." Participant 9 highlighted that "Prior to teachers...receiving or being placed in a support plan...whether that's through professional development or...side by side coaching or...collaboration that's...a support that's given prior to a support plan. Additionally, Participant 7 described that before a formal support plan is written, teachers typically receive multiple rounds of coaching conversations, walkthrough feedback, and collaborative support with instructional coaches, and that these supports are used to address identified gaps before more formal intervention is required.

Support, as it pertained to coaching and modeling was a focal element of all responses with no respondents highlighting punitive or authoritative dimensions of compliance-based leadership. Additionally, across respondents, there was strong consistency in how coaching and modeling were described as central to addressing challenges before and during the use of support plans. Multiple participants emphasized that instructional coaching, side-by-side support, and lesson modeling were used as primary tools to help teachers improve, often prior to the formal

initiation of a support plan. Participant 3, Participant 9, and Participant 10 each referenced different entry points into this process, including district coaching, professional development, and individualized coaching conversations. Participant 7 similarly described a sequence of walkthroughs, feedback, and collaborative support before formal plans were written. While participants varied in the structure and personnel involved in providing coaching, none described relying solely on written directives or compliance mechanisms. Instead, administrators consistently highlighted interactive and ongoing instructional support as the primary means of addressing teacher performance challenges within this theme.

Systemic Constraints and Organizational Friction

The selected exemplar quotation related to RQ2's systemic constraints and organizational friction category was also used in the RQ1 discussion as a supporting quotation. This demonstrates that these responses do not necessarily only apply to a single category. Instead, many of these do not fit neatly into singular category and instead inform in a systems capacity. With this in mind, the selected exemplar quote comes from Participant 8, who stated, "Outside influences...you maybe have other people who want to...call the union...and that kind of helps kind of put a stop on it." Participant 2 explained beyond outside influences, "Time is definitely an obstacle. It's very extensive, you have to be very detailed, you have to be very careful, it has to be truly tailored to the teachers' needs." Participant 9 also referenced timetables, "Timelines... the time in which...the teacher may not have sufficient time...to get the professional development or the support needed... because of everything that happens in a school setting day in and day out." Participant 5 bridged the divides of time and external influences with some specificity. The respondent cited navigating employee services, documentation requirements, and compliance procedures often adds layers of procedural complexity when a teacher resists

feedback, requiring administrators to seek guidance on wording, timelines, and next steps before continuing with a support plan.

Across participants, there was symmetry pertaining to how organizational and procedural constraints were described as shaping administrators' ability to implement support plans. Multiple respondents identified time limitations as a persistent barrier, noting that the demands of the school day, documentation, and individualized planning reduced the amount of support that could be delivered within available windows. Participant 8's reference to union involvement highlighted an additional layer of external influence that could interrupt or slow the support process. Participant 2 and Participant 9 both emphasized the intensity of timelines and the difficulty of balancing detailed planning with daily operational demands. While participants differed in whether they emphasized contractual, procedural, or scheduling barriers, all described systemic conditions that extended beyond individual teacher behavior. No respondent suggested that support plans functioned independently of these broader organizational constraints.

Teacher Mindset, Buy-in, and Perceptions of Support

As it relates to mindset, buy-in, and perceptions of support for RQ2, Participant 4 noted, "Upset. Yes...it hasn't been a surprise...we've had coaching conversations...so when it gets to that point it's not a surprise." Participant 10 also noted the process and lack of surprise related to mindset and stated,

For the most part, if it's something that we've talked about...if it's something that I've never mentioned and all of a sudden I'm putting you on it, like anyone, they would be kind of nervous, but if it's something that we've discussed...then obviously it kind of ties itself for them to be on board.

Participant 9 also made the important observation that teachers often initially believe they do not need a support plan, but after receiving observation feedback and reviewing data, many become more open to coaching and begin to view the plan as an opportunity to try new strategies, particularly when they are willing to engage with suggestions and support. This aligns with Participant 6, who stated, “Teacher buy-in. If they don’t see that there’s a problem, and if they aren’t self-aware that there’s a problem, they’re not going to be willing to grow...It doesn’t matter what that plan looks like...It’s not gonna work. Step number one is the teacher, and that teacher mindset, and buy in.”

Across participants, there was strong convergence around the idea that teacher mindset and prior communication shaped how support plans were received. Participant 4 and Participant 10 both emphasized that when concerns had already been discussed through coaching conversations, placement on a support plan was less surprising and more likely to be accepted. Participant 9 similarly noted that teachers’ openness often increased after they reviewed observation feedback and student data, which helped them better understand the reasons for the plan. These accounts indicate that teachers’ initial reactions were influenced not only by the content of the plan but also by the process leading up to it.

In tandem, participants described variation in how teachers responded to feedback and support. Participant 6 emphasized that self-awareness and willingness to acknowledge areas for growth were essential for a plan to be effective. Some teachers were described as becoming more receptive once evidence was presented, while others remained resistant if they did not perceive a problem. Although administrators described different pathways to gaining buy-in, none suggested that mindset was irrelevant. Instead, all participants highlighted teacher beliefs,

openness, and perceptions of fairness as factors that shaped how challenges associated with support plans were navigated.

Research Question 3: How do School Administrators Execute and Monitor Teacher Support Plans to Promote Teacher Growth and Improved Instructional Practices?

Administrators described the execution and monitoring of support plans as dynamic, evidence-driven processes that require continuous interaction with teachers and ongoing adjustment of instructional supports. Across participants, four interconnected themes emerged: standards alignment and the use of evidence to guide monitoring, coaching and modeling as mechanisms for implementation, systemic constraints related to documentation and workload, and the influence of teacher mindset on sustained engagement. While each theme reflects a distinct dimension of execution, together they illustrate that support plans are not static documents, but evolving processes shaped by instructional evidence, organizational demands, and teacher responsiveness. These findings suggest that effective execution depends on both structured monitoring systems and the relational conditions that support teacher growth. Table 4.5 provides a summary of the key themes associated with Research Question 3, including their descriptions, representative examples, and the frequency with which they were reflected across participant responses.

Table 4.5

Summary of Themes for Research Question 3

Theme	Description	Example	Frequency
Standards Alignment and Clarity of Expectations	Administrators described execution as grounded in aligning instructional	“The rubric is the Bible for me...and the effectiveness is also	All participants

	expectations with measurable evidence from observations and student performance data.	based on...student growth.” (Participant 3)	
Coaching, Modeling, and Layered Instructional Support	Execution was carried out through ongoing coaching, modeling, and classroom-based support, with adjustments made based on observed instructional progress.	“When a plan is not working...we adjust by modeling...having someone show what to do.” (Participant 10)	All participants
Systemic Constraints and Organizational Friction	Execution required intensive documentation, frequent observations, and coordination, creating workload and procedural demands that shaped implementation.	“Timestamped document...triangulating observations, student performance, and lesson internalizations.” (Participant 7)	Many participants
Teacher Mindset, Buy-in, and Perceptions of Support	Teacher willingness to engage, reflect, and adapt influenced how consistently support plans were	“If they don’t have the mindset...this is urgent... it’s not gonna work.” (Participant 6)	Most participants

implemented and
monitored over time.

Note. Frequency categories reflect qualitative patterns across participant responses.

Standards Alignment and Clarity of Expectations

With respect to RQ3's theme of standards alignment and clarity of expectations, the selected exemplar quotation from Participant 3 stated, "The rubric...the rubric is the Bible for me...and the effectiveness is also based on the data, on the students' growth...matching goals in the action plan with the future observation." Participant 1 further highlighted in this domain, "Our action steps have to identify how we are going to measure that level of success, not just the procedural part." Participant 4 continued with specific elements noted, "Using the T-TESS rubric, doing walkthroughs, and seeing student work." Building on this, Participant 10 explained that support plans are built by identifying specific areas of need through walkthroughs, observations, and student data, then aligning goals and tracking progress against those data points to determine whether instruction is improving. This reflects a standards-driven process in which expectations are operationalized through measurable evidence rather than general impressions. Overall, these responses reinforce that across campuses, administrators operationalize RQ3 not just through formal rubrics but through tight alignment between expectations, instructional evidence, and student outcome data.

As seen throughout the participant responses, there was overall symmetry in terms of how administrators described using formal standards and evidence to guide the execution and monitoring of support plans. Multiple respondents referenced the use of rubrics, walkthroughs, and student data as tools for determining whether instructional changes were occurring and whether goals outlined in support plans were being met. Participant 3 and Participant 4 both emphasized the central role of T-TESS and observational evidence, while Participant 1

highlighted the importance of defining how success would be measured. Participant 10 similarly described a process in which goals and progress were monitored through data and observation. Although participants varied in the specific tools they emphasized, including but not limited to walkthroughs, student work, or formal observations, there was no indication that any relied on informal or subjective judgment alone. Instead, administrators consistently described execution as a process grounded in clearly articulated expectations and multiple sources of evidence.

Coaching, Modeling, and Layered Instructional Support

For coaching, modeling, and layered instructional support that relate to RQ3's execution dynamics, Participant 3's exemplar response, as indicated in the matrix, was as follows, "We line up things that we can do...visiting other classrooms, doing coaching conversations... working with peers, PLCs...professional development." Some respondents emphasized the fallibility of the support plans themselves and the importance of understanding this and being flexible rather than defeated. For example, Participant 10 noted, "When a plan is not working...one thing that we could do would be adjusted by modeling...maybe bringing somebody into the classroom and having them go ahead and show exactly what they're doing." Additionally, Participant 1 noted, "Because what we do is just a paper. A support plan is a paper, but if we don't go into the classrooms and see it in action... then we don't get the true story behind what we have developed."

Participant 7 was more specific about the process of support plans and general instructional support. This respondent explained that support plans are executed through a structured cycle of weekly walkthroughs, coaching conversations, and collaboration with instructional coaches, with progress monitored through aligned evidence and student data so the type of support can be adjusted as teachers work on targeted domains of growth. In sum, these

responses reinforce that RQ3's execution dynamics are not limited to written plans but are enacted through modeling, in-class coaching, and continuous monitoring across multiple roles.

Administrators described the execution of support plans as something that unfolded through ongoing instructional work rather than through static documentation. Several respondents emphasized that classroom visits, modeling, and direct coaching were necessary to determine whether a plan was actually influencing practice. Participant 10 and Participant 1 both pointed to the need to adjust the type of support when progress was not evident, noting that written plans alone could not capture what was happening in real instructional settings. Participant 7 added a more procedural view by outlining a cycle of walkthroughs, coaching conversations, and collaboration with instructional coaches that allowed administrators to monitor progress and refine the type of support over time. Although the structure of these processes varied from campus to campus, no respondent suggested that implementation could occur without regular observation and interaction with teachers. Instead, execution was consistently portrayed as a dynamic process involving continual feedback, instructional modeling, and monitoring of evidence tied to teacher growth.

Systemic Constraints and Organizational Friction

Within the theme of systemic constraints and organizational friction for RQ3, Participant 7 provided an exemplar account that captures how organizational conditions influenced implementation. The participant's quote was as follows:

[utilize] the preponderance of evidence seen and heard...Timestamped document that has teacher actions and student actions to script the evidence throughout walkthroughs and evaluations. Triangulating the data of observations, student performance, and

teachers' lesson internalizations help validate the findings. In addition, I calibrate with the leadership team to ensure consistency through observation.

Participant 1 continued this line of thought by stating, "When teachers are not receptive to the feedback... we go back to the factual data...X amount of students were not engaged... you have to be more intentional with being factual in your... data that you're collecting in the walkthroughs." Participant 1 also noted that "most of the time in our support plans, we will conduct two, at minimum, two walkthroughs per week for that teacher, so that we are able to identify quickly." Additionally, Participant 2 described that administrators rely on repeated walkthroughs, formal observations, and accumulated classroom evidence to determine next steps in a support plan, noting that balancing what can be observed in brief visits with more comprehensive documentation over time is necessary to guide implementation decisions.

Taken together, these responses show strong alignment in how administrators described the procedural and organizational demands involved in executing support plans. Multiple participants emphasized the need to collect and document evidence through frequent walkthroughs, formal observations, and student data in order to justify instructional feedback and determine next steps. Participant 7 and Participant 1 both highlighted the importance of maintaining detailed, factual records to support decision making, particularly when teachers were resistant to feedback. Participant 1's reference to conducting multiple walkthroughs each week further illustrates the time and workload required to sustain this level of monitoring. Participant 2 similarly described the challenge of balancing brief classroom visits with the need to gather sufficient documentation over time. Although participants emphasized different aspects of the process, they all described execution as being shaped by significant documentation and monitoring requirements rather than informal judgment alone.

Teacher Mindset, Buy-in, and Perceptions of Support

An exemplar of how teacher mindset, buy-in, and perceptions of support under RQ3 were provided by Participant 10, who stated, “You do get a bit more pushback from your veteran teachers...they’ve done something that way for so long that you’re trying to break...change is often hard for many people.” Although Participant 10’s statement was referenced earlier as supporting evidence for teacher mindset in relation to support plan design, it is also presented here because it directly captures how teacher buy-in and resistance continue to shape the execution of support plans over time, illustrating how participant responses often informed multiple analytic dimensions rather than fitting neatly within a single category. Participant 6 noted that a lack of urgency for change can become an issue,

But if they don’t have the mindset of, this is urgent, this is a problem, I need to change, I need to fix something. It’s not gonna work. Step number one is the teacher, and that teacher mindset, and buy-in.

They continued, “We have to continue to document and continue to meet... is there something in their mindset?”

Participant 2 contrasted the problematic mindset with more positive dimensions that they noticed. The respondent explained that teachers who demonstrate a growth mindset and willingness to put in effort are more likely to engage with coaching and instructional support during a plan, whereas teachers who do not believe they need help tend to view the process more negatively and resist changes to their practice. Together, these responses show that teacher mindset not only influences whether support plans are accepted but also shapes how consistently they are enacted, monitored, and adjusted throughout the implementation process.

Across respondents, mindset was consistently described as a factor that could either accelerate or hinder the ongoing work required to carry out a support plan. Several administrators indicated that even when plans were clearly written and supports were in place, progress depended on whether teachers were willing to engage in reflection, accept feedback, and try new instructional strategies. Participant 10 and Participant 6 both described how resistance, particularly among more experienced teachers, could slow the pace of implementation and require additional documentation and follow-up. Participant 2, in contrast, pointed to teachers who were open to growth and more willing to work with coaches as being easier to support through the process. Although participants differed in how they described these attitudes, all acknowledged that mindset influenced how support plans were experienced in practice. No respondent suggested that execution could be separated from teacher beliefs about the process.

Document Analysis of Teacher Support Plans

To complement the interview findings, teacher support plan documents were reviewed to examine how administrators described their practices were translated into formal structures and procedures. The findings of the teacher support plans created a document-based confirmation of the themes outlined in the interview responses. Table 4.6 presents a cross-case artifact matrix summarizing key features of the ten support plans, including standards alignment, coaching supports, monitoring and evidence requirements, compliance language, and teacher responsibilities. The matrix provides an overview of how instructional expectations and accountability mechanisms were operationalized across campuses and serves as a document-based lens for understanding how support plans functioned in practice.

Table 4.6*Support Plan Artifact Matrix*

Participant	Standards Anchors	Coaching Supports	Monitoring & Evidence	Teacher Responsibilities
P1	T-TESS Domains 1.1,1.4,2.1	Weekly coaching, observations	Walkthroughs, data reviews	Meetings, artifacts
P2	T-TESS domains	Model teachers, coaching	Task tracking, dates	Submit work
P3	T-TESS 2.1,2.2,2.4,3.2	PLC, demo teachers	Weekly logs	Plans, evidence
P4	T-TESS domains	Coaching cycles	Observations	Participation
P5	Student data linked	Coaching	Data review	Reports
P6	Rubric aligned	Support meetings	Monitoring	Meetings
P7	T-TESS domains	Coaching	Evidence logs	Artifacts
P8	Standards based	Coaching	Checkpoints	Compliance
P9	Domains	Support staff	Walkthroughs	Meetings
P10	Domains 2 & 3	Rehearsals, demos	Weekly logs	Artifacts

Viewed together, the support plan artifacts demonstrate how district standards, instructional supports, and accountability structures are embedded in formal documentation,

providing a concrete foundation for understanding the themes that emerged from administrators' interview narratives.

Standard Anchoring

In terms of standards anchoring, each plan is explicitly tied to T-TESS domains and dimensions. For example, Participant 1's plan targets Domains 1.1, 1.4, and 2.1. Participant 3's action plan anchors expectations related to Dimensions 2.1, 2.2, 2.4, and 3.2. Additionally, Participant 10's TINA plan maps every deficit to Domain 2 and 3 indicators. Standards alignment in these plans demonstrated that they were structural and not simply rhetorical.

Coaching and Modeling

Coaching and modeling were also built into the respective plans. Every plan embeds coaching, peer observation, or demonstrative teaching. Participant 10, for example, included lesson rehearsals, demo teachers, and feedback loops. Participant 3 required demo teachers, PLCs, and coaching conferences. Participant 2 mandated model teacher observations and coaching cycles. Similarly, Participant 1 required weekly meetings and classroom visits. Participant 4's plan requires the teacher to participate in scheduled coaching cycles tied to specific T-TESS indicators, with administrators conducting follow-up walkthroughs to observe whether modeled strategies were being implemented in the classroom. Participant 5's support plan links coaching to student performance by requiring the teacher to review assessment data with an instructional coach and adjust lesson delivery based on identified gaps. Additionally, Participant 8's plan similarly requires structured coaching sessions and documented feedback following classroom observations, ensuring that instructional modeling is paired with written follow-up. Together, these artifacts show that coaching and modeling were not informal supports

but were formally required components of how improvement efforts were enacted across campuses. Each mirrored the interview theme of layered instructional support.

Systemic Monitoring and Documentation

All the plans were intensely procedural in nature. They included quantifiable actions like timestamps, weekly walkthroughs, signed meetings, required submissions, binder templates, and evidence thresholds. For example, Participant 2's plan documents every missed task with dates and consequences. Participant 5's plan ties student performance data directly to plan success. Additionally, Participant 10's plan required weekly documentation, logs, and review checkpoints. Participant 1's plan requires administrators to conduct and record multiple walkthroughs each week, with documented feedback aligned to specific T-TESS indicators, creating a running log of instructional evidence across the duration of the plan. Participant 7's plan uses timestamped scripting of both teacher and student actions during walkthroughs, along with leadership-team calibration meetings, to validate the reliability of the evidence being collected. These examples further demonstrate that support plans functioned as tightly regulated monitoring systems rather than informal improvement guides.

Behavioral Compliance

The plans highlighted that behavioral compliance was explicit. Several plans included clear language describing the related consequences for noncompliance. Participant 3's plan, for example, stated "Failure to comply may result in further disciplinary such as recommendation for termination or non-renewal." The respondent additionally highlighted that "This correspondence will become part of your file." Participant 6 also has very specific compliance notations that are denoted through the use of the word "will" that illustrates that the plan is not optional. Their plan stated, "We will meet on December 19, 2023, to discuss your progress. A calendar invite will be

sent to you. You will provide me with feedback on any support that you need to assist you in completing this performance improvement plan.” Participant 2 had the noted statement that agreement is not required by the signature lines. This clause may be pertinent for external influences and systemic elements related to union-related dynamics. For example, Participant 8 in the interview portion specifically cited unions as an outside influence. In total, the plans directly connected to interview themes related to organizational friction.

Teacher Urgency

All of the plans signal importance and urgency in their tone. In the plans, teachers are required to submit plans, attend meetings, rehearse lessons, provide artifacts, and accept feedback. They also show that teachers are more than passive recipients of the plan. Instead, they are active. For example, Participant 1 and Participant 10 both asked for feedback and support for the teachers in the planning phase and potential adaptations. Participant 6 also noted the results of their performance improvement plan, which illustrated that the plan was not successfully implemented at proficient levels. They showed the data related to the teacher in question based on tangible artifacts that highlighted the Domains 2.1, 2.2, 3.1, and 3.2 were not implemented consistently and that “Classroom management routines created by the teacher and outlined in the minute-by-minute plan developed were not enforced or followed.” Together, these plans depict teacher urgency as structurally embedded through required actions, documented accountability, and evidence-based evaluation, positioning teachers as active participants whose responsiveness and follow-through directly shaped the trajectory of the support process.

Integration of Support Plan Artifacts with Interview Findings

Taken together, the teacher support plan documents as described by the participants provide a concrete, practice-based complement to administrators’ interview narratives. While the

interviews revealed how leaders conceptualized support, accountability, and instructional growth, the plans demonstrate how those ideas were codified into formal systems that governed daily practice. Across all ten plans, instructional standards, coaching structures, documentation requirements, and behavioral expectations were operationalized through written procedures that defined how support was delivered, monitored, and evaluated. The consistency of these elements across campuses reinforces the cross-cutting themes identified in the interview data, particularly the centrality of standards alignment, layered instructional support, organizational constraints, and teacher mindset.

The artifact matrix further illustrates that support plans functioned not only as instructional guides but also as regulatory instruments that structured teacher participation, administrator oversight, and evidence collection. These documents show how leadership practices described by participants were embedded within institutional routines that required ongoing monitoring, compliance, and documentation. By triangulating interview data with these artifacts, the findings demonstrate that teacher support plans were not merely individualized interventions but part of a broader organizational system that balanced instructional improvement with accountability and procedural control.

Presentation of Themes

Consistent with a basic interpretive qualitative approach that seeks to understand how participants make meaning of a phenomenon in context (Creswell & Creswell, 2022), four integrative themes were constructed from administrators' accounts of developing and enacting teacher support plans. Theme A: standards alignment and clarity of expectations, captures how leaders anchored plans to district evaluation frameworks and the rigor of state standards, translating these anchors into concise, measurable expectations. Theme B: coaching, modeling,

and layered instructional support, reflects the pragmatic, relational work of instructional leadership, wherein administrators and support personnel co-plan, model or co-teach, and leverage peer observation to turn written plans into observable practice. Theme C: systemic constraints and organizational friction, encompasses the structural and procedural conditions that contour implementation (e.g., time and staffing limits, policy variability, documentation demands), revealing how organizational context shapes both the pace and fidelity of support. Finally, Theme D: teacher mindset, buy-in, and perceptions of support, illuminates the interpretive and affective dimensions of change, showing that teachers' beliefs, urgency, and perceived fairness mediate whether plans function as growth-oriented tools or are experienced as punitive oversight. Together, these themes provide a coherent, practice-proximal lens on how instructional expectations, leadership actions, organizational conditions, and teacher sense-making interact in the everyday enactment of support plans.

Summary of Findings

In summary, the findings reveal that administrators' use of teacher support plans is shaped by the interplay among instructional expectations, leadership practices, organizational conditions, and teacher sense-making. Across the three research questions, participants consistently described the importance of anchoring support plans in instructional standards and evaluation frameworks while clearly articulating a limited number of measurable expectations. These expectations were made actionable through coaching, modeling, and layered instructional supports that emphasized observation, feedback, and collaborative learning. At the same time, administrators navigated systemic constraints, such as time limitations, staffing capacity, policy variability, and documentation requirements, that both enabled and constrained implementation. Central to all aspects of the support plan process was teacher mindset and perception; teachers'

willingness to engage, their understanding of the plan's purpose, and their sense of trust in leadership significantly influenced whether support plans functioned as developmental tools or were experienced as punitive measures. Viewed through a basic interpretive lens (Creswell & Creswell, 2022), these findings highlight how administrators construct meaning around support plans not as isolated interventions, but as dynamic processes situated within the realities of instructional leadership, organizational systems, and human relationships.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusions

Chapter Five presents a discussion of the findings in relation to the research questions that guided this study. The purpose of the study was to explore school administrators' perspectives on teacher support plans for underperforming teachers. Specifically, the study examined how administrators describe the key components of effective teacher support plans, the purposes these plans serve, and the ways they are used to support teacher growth and improve instructional practices. In addition, the study investigated the challenges and tensions administrators experience when developing and implementing teacher support plans. Finally, the study explored how school administrators execute and manage these plans within their schools to promote professional growth and instructional improvement. This chapter interprets the findings in light of the research questions and relevant literature, highlighting their implications for educational leadership and practice.

Overview of Study

The present study investigated school administrators' perspectives on the design and implementation of support and growth plans for teachers experiencing difficulties in meeting instructional expectations. As instructional leaders, administrators serve a central role in guiding teacher effectiveness, and their viewpoints offer essential insight into the practical and organizational realities associated with supporting educators whose performance does not align with established standards. This inquiry sought to illuminate not only the processes through which support plans are enacted, but also the manner in which administrators negotiate the inherent tension between accountability and encouragement, respond to constraints in time and resources, and cultivate the trust necessary to engage teachers in meaningful improvement efforts.

By examining administrators' lived experiences, the study identified the strategies they regard as most conducive to fostering substantive teacher growth, as well as the obstacles that commonly impede progress. These barriers include, but are not limited to, resistance to constructive feedback, insufficiently differentiated professional development opportunities, and broader systemic limitations at the school or district level. The investigation also explored the emotional and professional complexities administrators encounter when addressing persistent underperformance, particularly as they work to sustain staff morale, promote a culture centered on continuous growth, and ensure equitable learning opportunities for all students.

Analysis

The findings of this study capture school administrators' perceptions, experiences, and practices concerning the development, implementation, and monitoring of teacher support plans. Organized according to the research questions, the findings illuminate how administrators conceptualize and operationalize support for underperforming teachers within their respective school contexts. Four cross-cutting themes emerged consistently across the data, permeating administrators' responses irrespective of the specific research question being addressed. These themes encompassed the critical importance of structural alignment and clarity of expectations, the essential role of coaching, mentoring, and instructional support, the impact of systemic constraints and organizational friction, and the pivotal significance of teacher mindset, buy-in, and perceptions of support. Collectively, these cross-cutting themes provide a comprehensive analytical framework through which administrators' approaches to teacher support plans can be understood and contextualize the findings presented in subsequent sections.

The findings of this study also reinforce the conceptual framework grounded in social constructivism presented in Chapter 2. Administrators' emphasis on coaching, mentoring, and

layered instructional support aligns with Vygotsky's (1978) concept of the ZPD, where teachers develop new instructional competencies through guided support rather than independent effort. Administrators consistently described their role as providing feedback, modeling practices, and facilitating professional learning, reflecting the function of the MKO within this framework. The importance of teacher mindset, buy-in, and relational trust further reflects the role of social interaction in shaping professional learning and growth. At the same time, the identified systemic constraints and organizational friction highlight conditions that can either support or limit effective scaffolding. The analysis demonstrates that administrator-led support plans function as structured scaffolds within a socially mediated learning environment, directly supporting the assumptions outlined in the conceptual framework.

Research Question 1: What Do Administrators Describe as Important Features or Components of Support Plans for Underperforming teachers?

Standards Alignment and Clarity of Expectations

Participants consistently emphasized the importance of aligning teacher support or improvement plans with established instructional standards and evaluation frameworks, which aligns with prior research highlighting the role of standards-based evaluation systems in structuring instructional improvement and accountability (Darling-Hammond, 2004). In addition to standard alignment, participants highlighted the necessity of clear directives, including specific action steps, defined timelines, and measurable goals. Several administrators noted that when expectations were explicitly communicated and supported by concrete benchmarks, teachers were better able to understand areas for growth and monitor their progress over time. This alignment and clarity were viewed as essential components for fostering accountability while also supporting professional growth. This emphasis on clarity and alignment reflects

broader findings that clearly defined expectations and evaluative criteria are essential for guiding teacher improvement while maintaining coherence across instructional systems (Supovitz et al., 2010).

Coaching, Modeling, and Layered Instructional Support

Participants consistently identified coaching as a crucial component of effective teacher support plans, reinforcing existing literature that positions instructional coaching as a primary mechanism for translating evaluation feedback into classroom practice (Knight, 2009; Supovitz et al., 2010). Administrators described intentionally leveraging multiple layers of instructional support, including instructional coaches, mentor teachers, and district-level personnel who could model effective practices and provide targeted assistance. Rather than relying solely on written feedback or formal documentation, participants emphasized that meaningful support plans prioritize hands-on instructional assistance. Several administrators noted that coaching, mentoring, and embedded professional development created opportunities for underperforming teachers to receive ongoing guidance, reflect on practice, and implement instructional strategies with support. Participants recognized that this approach shifted teacher support plans from compliance-driven processes to growth-oriented systems focused on improving instructional practice. This approach reflects a shift away from compliance-oriented supervision toward collaborative, practice-embedded support models that emphasize professional learning through guided interaction and feedback (Cox, 2015).

Systemic Constraints and Organizational Friction

Participants frequently identified time as a primary constraint when developing and implementing teacher support plans, which is consistent with research highlighting the competing demands and organizational pressures that shape administrators' capacity to provide

sustained instructional leadership (Carvalho et al., 2022; Moore et al., 2024). Administrators acknowledged the ongoing tension between creating meaningful, targeted support and the limited time available within the school day. Several participants emphasized that support plans should not become merely procedural or paperwork-driven tasks, but rather intentional and strategic tools designed to address specific instructional needs. However, participants also recognized the practical limitations of balancing instructional leadership responsibilities, compliance requirements, and daily operational demands. As a result, administrators described the challenge of minimizing excessive documentation while still ensuring accountability and follow-through. This tension highlighted the need for streamlined, purposeful support plans that maximize instructional impact without overburdening teachers or administrators. These findings further support literature suggesting that structural and procedural demands can limit the depth and consistency of instructional support, even when administrators prioritize teacher development (Carvalho et al., 2022).

Teacher Mindset, Buy-in, and Perceptions of Support

Participants consistently emphasized that the effectiveness of teacher support plans was closely tied to teachers' ability to identify their own areas of weakness and engage in reflective practice, aligning with research on adult learning that underscores the importance of self-awareness and internal motivation in professional growth (Cox, 2015). Administrators noted that when teachers were able to honestly analyze both their strengths and areas for growth, support plans became more meaningful and productive. Participants described teacher mindset as a central factor in the success of support plans, with a growth mindset viewed as essential for sustained improvement. Teachers who perceived the support process as developmental rather than punitive were more likely to engage in coaching, implement feedback, and demonstrate

progress over time. Administrators stressed that reflection, self-awareness, and openness to feedback allowed teachers to take ownership of their professional growth, ultimately strengthening the impact of the support plan. This finding also reinforces prior work demonstrating that teachers are more likely to engage in and sustain instructional improvement when they perceive support systems as developmental rather than evaluative or punitive (Grillo & Kier, 2021).

Research Question 2: What are The Challenges and Tensions Administrators Experience When Developing and Implementing Teacher Support Plans?

Standards Alignment and Clarity of Expectations

Administrators described the challenge of ensuring that walkthroughs and observations were conducted consistently and grounded in established teacher evaluation frameworks, which served as the anchor for instructional feedback and aligns with prior research emphasizing the importance of multiple measures and evidence sources in evaluating instructional effectiveness (Supovitz et al., 2010; Darling-Hammond, 2004). Participants noted that relying on isolated observations was insufficient for accurately determining teacher performance. Instead, they emphasized the intentional use of multiple data sources, including repeated walkthroughs, formal observations, student work, and student performance data. Administrators highlighted the necessity of triangulating observational data with student outcomes to create a more accurate and comprehensive understanding of instructional effectiveness. This connected approach was viewed as critical for ensuring that feedback and support plans were coherent, defensible, and aligned with both instructional standards and student learning goals. This emphasis on triangulating data sources reflects broader findings that reliance on a single observation can

produce incomplete or inaccurate assessments of teaching quality, reinforcing the need for comprehensive, evidence-based evaluation practices (Darling-Hammond, 2004).

Coaching, Modeling, and Layered Instructional Support

Participants described the development of teacher support plans as a process grounded in ongoing coaching conversations, consistent walkthrough feedback, and collaboration with campus-based instructional coaches, reinforcing existing literature that positions sustained coaching as central to instructional improvement (Knight, 2009; Supovitz et al., 2010).

Administrators emphasized that placement on a support plan was never intended to be a sudden or unexpected event. Instead, participants noted that multiple coaching conversations, informal feedback, and opportunities for instructional modeling were provided before the initiation of a formal support plan. This approach ensured that teachers were aware of expectations and had received guidance before more structured interventions were implemented. Participants further highlighted instructional coaching and modeling as primary tools for improving teaching practice, noting that sustained coaching relationships and targeted instructional support were more effective than isolated feedback or documentation alone. This staged approach to support aligns with research suggesting that early, non-evaluative coaching interactions can reduce resistance and improve the effectiveness of later, more formal interventions (Cox, 2015).

Systemic Constraints and Organizational Friction

Participants described several challenges that complicated the development and implementation of teacher support plans, including concerns related to contractual obligations and, in some cases, teacher union involvement, which is consistent with research highlighting how organizational and policy constraints shape administrators' capacity to deliver sustained instructional support (Carvalho et al., 2022; Moore et al., 2024). However, administrators

consistently identified time as the most significant constraint. Participants explained that the demands of the school day, such as instructional leadership responsibilities, required documentation, and compliance expectations, often limited the amount of time available to provide individualized instructional support. Administrators noted the challenge of delivering meaningful, targeted assistance within narrow time windows while simultaneously meeting documentation requirements. This tension underscored the difficulty of balancing instructional support with organizational and systemic demands, making time one of the most persistent challenges administrators face when creating and sustaining effective teacher support plans. These findings reinforce existing literature suggesting that time, procedural demands, and competing responsibilities can limit the depth and consistency of support, even when administrators prioritize instructional improvement (Moore et al., 2024).

Teacher Mindset, Buy-in, and Perceptions of Support

Participants consistently indicated that teachers' beliefs, openness, and perceptions of fairness played a significant role in how challenges associated with support plans were navigated, aligning with research on adult learning and professional growth that emphasizes the importance of internal motivation and self-perception in sustaining change (Cox, 2015). Administrators noted that effective implementation depended heavily on teachers' willingness to recognize areas of need and accept support as a developmental process rather than a punitive measure. Participants emphasized that when teachers demonstrated an open mindset and strong buy-in, support plans were more likely to be implemented with fidelity and lead to instructional improvement. Conversely, administrators acknowledged that without teacher buy-in and a growth-oriented mindset, implementing support plans became significantly more complex and challenging. This finding highlighted the central role of teacher perception in shaping both the

process and outcomes of teacher support plans. This finding also supports prior research demonstrating that teachers are more likely to engage in and sustain instructional improvement when support is perceived as developmental and grounded in trust rather than evaluation alone (Grillo & Kier, 2021).

Research Question 3: How do School Administrators Execute and Monitor Teacher Support Plans to Promote Teacher Growth and Improved Instructional Practices?

Standards Alignment and Clarity of Expectations

Administrators described the challenge of ensuring that walkthroughs and observations were conducted consistently and grounded in established teacher evaluation frameworks, which served as the anchor for instructional feedback and aligns with prior research emphasizing the importance of multiple measures and evidence sources in evaluating instructional effectiveness (Supovitz et al., 2010; Darling-Hammond, 2004). Administrators reported that all observations and walkthroughs were conducted using the established rubric, which served as the primary anchor for monitoring instructional progress. Participants emphasized that aligning feedback, walkthrough data, and observations to the rubric provided a clear framework for both administrators and teachers. This approach ensured that support plans remained focused, consistent, and directly connected to expectations used to evaluate instructional practice. This emphasis on triangulating data sources reflects broader findings that reliance on a single observation can produce incomplete or inaccurate assessments of teaching quality, reinforcing the need for comprehensive, evidence-based evaluation practices (Darling-Hammond, 2004).

Coaching, Modeling, and Layered Instructional Support

Participants described the development of teacher support plans as a process grounded in ongoing coaching conversations, consistent walkthrough feedback, and collaboration with

campus-based instructional coaches, reinforcing existing literature that positions sustained coaching as central to instructional improvement (Knight, 2009; Supovitz et al., 2010). Administrators emphasized that when progress was not evident, they engaged in ongoing, collaborative conversations with teachers, often supported by instructional coaches or mentors. Walkthroughs and classroom observations were used as opportunities to provide targeted coaching, model effective practices, and guide teachers in real-time. Participants highlighted that these interactions also allowed for adjustments to the support plan when necessary, ensuring that interventions were responsive to teacher needs. By leveraging layered support and continuous collaboration, administrators reported that teachers were better able to implement feedback and improve instructional practice, reinforcing the dynamic, growth-focused nature of support plans. This staged approach to support aligns with research suggesting that early, non-evaluative coaching interactions can reduce resistance and improve the effectiveness of later, more formal interventions (Cox, 2015).

Systemic Constraints and Organizational Friction

Participants described several challenges that complicated the development and implementation of teacher support plans, including concerns related to contractual obligations and, in some cases, teacher union involvement, which is consistent with research highlighting how organizational and policy constraints shape administrators' capacity to deliver sustained instructional support (Carvalho et al., 2022; Moore et al., 2024). Administrators emphasized that all actions, observations, and feedback must be grounded in evidence collected through walkthroughs, classroom visits, and student performance data. They highlighted the importance of ensuring that instructional decisions were comprehensive, objective, and defensible, rather than based on informal judgments or perceptions alone. Participants noted that aligning

observations with multiple sources of evidence helped maintain consistency and credibility in the support process, even within the constraints of limited time and competing responsibilities. This approach reinforced the need for careful planning and data-driven communication to effectively monitor and adjust teacher support plans. These findings reinforce existing literature suggesting that time, procedural demands, and competing responsibilities can limit the depth and consistency of support, even when administrators prioritize instructional improvement (Moore et al., 2024).

Teacher Mindset, Buy-in, and Perceptions of Support

Participants consistently indicated that teachers' beliefs, openness, and perceptions of fairness played a significant role in how challenges associated with support plans were navigated, aligning with research on adult learning and professional growth that emphasizes the importance of internal motivation and self-perception in sustaining change (Cox, 2015).

Administrators noted that a teacher's mindset could either accelerate or hinder progress, with teachers who demonstrated a growth-oriented perspective more likely to engage actively in coaching, implement feedback, and improve instructional practices. Conversely, participants highlighted that without teacher buy-in, even well-designed support plans could encounter resistance, limiting their effectiveness. This finding reinforced the critical role of fostering a positive perception of support and ensuring teachers understand the developmental purpose of the plan in promoting professional growth. This finding also supports prior research demonstrating that teachers are more likely to engage in and sustain instructional improvement when support is perceived as developmental and grounded in trust rather than evaluation alone (Grillo & Kier, 2021).

Document Analysis of Teacher Support Plans

Standards Alignment as Institutional Practice

The ubiquitous presence of T-TESS domains across all administrator support plans reflects how standardized evaluation frameworks function as both legitimizing structures and mediational tools in instructional leadership. As revealed in the document analysis as reported by the principals, administrators consistently anchored improvement efforts to specific T-TESS dimensions—Participant 1 targeted Domains 1.1, 1.4, and 2.1, while Participant 3 focused on Dimensions 2.1, 2.2, 2.4, and 3.2. This standards-based approach aligns with Vygotsky's conception of culturally mediated tools, where the T-TESS rubric serves as the primary symbolic instrument mediating administrator-teacher interactions (Kozulin, 2003). Participant 4 articulated this mediational function explicitly: "I go off the T-TESS rubric...the areas that yield the highest impact are the dimensions that we focus on." However, this institutional reliance on standardized frameworks creates what Darling-Hammond (2004) describes as the dual nature of accountability systems—providing necessary structure while potentially constraining holistic instructional vision. The rubric legitimizes administrative authority by grounding feedback in district-sanctioned language, yet simultaneously narrows the lens through which teaching quality is observed and valued. As Kozulin and Presseisen (1995) note, the tools we use to mediate learning shape what becomes visible and therefore improvable.

This specificity of standards anchoring produces a fundamental tension between targeted intervention and comprehensive instructional support. While administrators emphasized that precise domain identification created clarity—Participant 10 noted teachers "need to know exactly what they're doing wrong"—this precision may inadvertently fragment teaching into discrete, measurable components. The documents reveal how support plans operationalize

improvement through narrowly defined indicators: student engagement percentages, specific questioning strategies, or classroom management protocols. Though such specificity enables monitoring and creates shared evaluative language, it risks oversimplifying complex teaching practices through compliance-oriented systems, as Darling-Hammond (2004) characterizes. The rubric's structure directs administrator attention toward observable, codifiable behaviors while potentially marginalizing dimensions of teaching that resist standardization—such as relational trust-building, culturally responsive pedagogy, or adaptive expertise. As Supovitz et al. (2010) found, principals' influence on instruction operates through both direct feedback and the collaborative cultures they foster, suggesting that exclusive focus on rubric-defined competencies may overlook the relational and cultural dimensions through which instructional improvement actually unfolds in practice.

Coaching Structures as Scaffolding Mechanisms

The document analysis as reported by the principals revealed that coaching structures within teacher support plans were operationalized as multi-layered scaffolding systems extending beyond simple one-on-one mentoring relationships. Across the ten support plans examined, coaching requirements included weekly meetings with instructional coaches, lesson rehearsals with administrators, observations of demo teachers, and participation in professional learning communities. Participant 10's plan exemplified high coaching specificity by mandating lesson rehearsals during planning periods and structured feedback loops following demonstration lessons. In contrast, other plans used more general language such as "meet with coach weekly" without detailing the nature or content of those interactions. This variance suggests differing administrator beliefs about what constitutes effective support. From a sociocultural perspective, these formalized coaching structures align with Vygotsky's concept of the more knowledgeable

other (MKO), positioning instructional coaches and mentor teachers as expert guides who mediate teacher learning (Taber, 2018). However, the highly prescriptive nature of some plans—requiring multiple weekly meetings, rehearsals, and observations raises questions about whether such intensive mandates create genuine zones of proximal development or impose compliance burdens that may undermine collaborative coaching relationships.

The tension between formalized coaching requirements and relational trust emerged as a critical finding in the document analysis as reported by the principals. While Knight's (2009) partnership principles emphasize equality, choice, and dialogue as foundational to effective coaching relationships, the support plans examined often positioned coaching as a mandatory intervention rather than a collaborative partnership. Documents required teachers to "participate in coaching cycles," "attend weekly planning sessions," and "implement feedback," framing coaching as supervisory oversight rather than co-constructed professional learning. This directive approach may conflict with adult learning principles; andragogy suggests adults are self-directed learners motivated by internal needs rather than external mandates (Cox, 2015). The intensity of coaching requirements—particularly plans mandating daily or twice-weekly sessions suggests administrators believed underperforming teachers required sustained, frequent intervention to develop instructional competence. However, such intensive monitoring may inadvertently communicate deficit orientations, positioning teachers as lacking agency rather than as professionals capable of growth. As Cox (2015) notes, transformative learning requires learners to experience disorienting dilemmas that prompt critical reflection, yet mandated coaching may foreclose space for teachers to develop self-awareness and ownership of their learning journey.

The teacher support plans examined in this study reveal a procedural intensity that fundamentally shapes the administrator-teacher relationship through extensive documentation

requirements. These artifacts mandate weekly logs, timestamped submissions, signed meeting records, data binders, and formal evidence collection across multiple evaluation cycles. This documentation serves a dual function within the organization: protecting districts from legal challenges while ostensibly collecting evidence for instructional improvement. Bridges (1993) underscores this protective function, noting that during dismissal proceedings, the district administration is generally obligated to present oral and written evidence and may refer to notes and documentation they have prepared. However, the artifacts reveal a tension between these purposes. Plans require submission "every Friday by 5:00 p.m. via email," establish "weekly walkthroughs conducted by administrators," and mandate "sign-in documentation" for coaching sessions. While framed as support structures, these requirements create what might be termed organizational friction the procedural demands that accompany remediation efforts. The question emerges: when does this documentation serve genuine instructional decision-making versus functioning primarily as compliance evidence for potential future proceedings?

This documentation burden significantly shapes how administrators allocate their limited time, transforming the nature of instructional leadership itself. The support plans illustrate this constraint through repeated references to weekly meetings, multiple observations, coaching cycles, and evidence reviews each requiring substantial documentation. Sharif (2020) observes that principals cannot “achieve the academic target alone” and must develop instructional leadership teams to distribute this work effectively. Yet the procedural intensity documented in these artifacts suggests opportunity costs: hours spent completing observation forms, reviewing and providing written feedback on lesson plans, maintaining compliance records, and preparing documentation for potential legal challenge represent time unavailable for authentic coaching conversations or collaborative problem-solving. This shift has implications for administrator

identity and role conception. Rather than positioning administrators as instructional leaders who develop teacher capacity through sustained collegial relationships, intensive documentation requirements may inadvertently reframe the role as compliance manager—one who monitors, records, and builds cases (Koli Plaku & Leka, 2025). This identity tension connects to broader challenges of principal role ambiguity and overload within contemporary accountability systems (Carvalho et al., 2022).

Compliance Language and Power Dynamics

The explicit behavioral compliance language embedded throughout the support plan artifacts reveals a fundamental tension between stated developmental intentions and punitive accountability structures. Participant 3's directive that "failure to comply may result in further disciplinary measures such as recommendation for termination or non-renewal" exemplifies how consequence-focused language positions support plans as mechanisms of evaluative control rather than formative professional growth. Similarly, Participant 6's repeated use of imperative "will" statements "you will provide me with feedback," "a calendar invite will be sent to you," constructs the plan as a non-negotiable mandate rather than a collaborative intervention. Most revealing is Participant 2's clause specifying that "agreement is not required" alongside signature lines, which explicitly removes teacher consent from the support process. This compliance-oriented framing aligns conceptually with summative rather than formative assessment practices, prioritizing final judgments of competence over continuous improvement through feedback (Chand & Pillay, 2024). While formative assessment emphasizes descriptive feedback that guides instructional adjustments, the consequence language in these artifacts functions in a summative manner, establishing fixed standards against which teachers are measured with limited agency to negotiate goals or processes (Aravena, 2023; Rangel et al., 2012).

This asymmetrical power relationship embedded in support plan documentation presents significant tensions when viewed through Vygotsky's sociocultural lens on learning and development. Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development fundamentally assumes that growth occurs through collaborative scaffolding between learner and more knowledgeable other, with the learner maintaining active agency in co-constructing understanding (Vygotsky, 1978). However, the hierarchical compliance structures evident in these artifacts position teachers as passive recipients of predetermined improvement directives rather than active participants in professional learning. While teachers must provide artifacts, attend meetings, and implement prescribed strategies, the essential structure of targeted domains, timelines, and consequences remains administratively imposed. This tension raises critical questions about the conditions under which directive support becomes necessary versus counterproductive. Iqbal and Zahoor (2024) demonstrate that punitive behavioral interventions often prove less effective than proactive, collaborative approaches that address underlying environmental and relational factors. Similarly, in cases where support plans rely primarily on compliance mechanisms, rather than on addressing systemic constraints, administrators identified effects such as time limitations, coaching capacity, and organizational barriers (Aravena, 2023; Range et al., 2012; Rhodes & Beinecke, 2011). Here, administrators risk reinforcing deficit-oriented mindsets rather than fostering the growth-oriented professional culture required for authentic instructional improvement (Chand & Pillay, 2024).

Documents as Windows into Institutional Logic

The teacher support plans analyzed across all ten participants revealed striking structural consistency despite variation in individual teacher contexts and performance needs. Every document anchors improvement expectations to T-TESS domains and dimensions, embeds

coaching and modeling as formalized support mechanisms, requires detailed evidence collection through walkthroughs and data reviews, and includes explicit compliance language regarding consequences for noncompliance. This uniformity suggests powerful district-level policy influence shaping how support is conceptualized and enacted at the campus level. DiMaggio and Powell's (1983) concept of institutional isomorphism offers a useful lens for understanding this pattern. Organizations within a shared field tend to become more similar over time through coercive, mimetic, and normative pressures. In this case, centralized evaluation frameworks, shared professional development structures, and common accountability expectations appear to have produced highly standardized support plan templates that administrators apply across diverse instructional contexts, reflecting institutional rules and norms about what constitutes legitimate teacher improvement efforts (Aravena, 2023; Range et al., 2012).

The alignment between artifacts and interview narratives is both confirming and revealing. Administrators consistently described standards-based targeting, layered instructional supports, and teacher mindset as central to their practice themes that appear prominently in the documentary record through rubric anchors, coaching cycles, and teacher acknowledgment signatures. However, the documents also surface dimensions of the support process less emphasized in interviews. The plans function simultaneously as instructional tools designed to scaffold teacher growth, accountability mechanisms that document performance deficiencies and timelines for improvement, and legal protections that establish procedural compliance should termination or non-renewal become necessary (Nagdaparan & Nagdaparan, 2025). This multiplicity creates inherent tensions administrators must navigate—supporting growth while documenting deficits, maintaining relational trust while enforcing procedural requirements, and balancing individualized responsiveness with institutional standardization. These tensions point

toward important implications for future support system design, particularly the need for structures that preserve both developmental flexibility and organizational accountability without collapsing one into the other (Meydan & Akkaş, 2024; Darling-Hammond, 2004; Vygotsky, 1978).

Strengths and Limitations

Methodological Strengths

This qualitative study makes several distinctive contributions to the literature on administrator perspectives regarding teacher support plans. By privileging the voices and lived experiences of campus leaders, this research addresses a conspicuous gap in educational scholarship that has historically concentrated on teacher perceptions of evaluation and support systems. Prior research has documented teacher experiences of being evaluated, yet administrators who design, implement, and monitor these interventions remain understudied actors in the improvement process (Nagdaparan & Nagdaparan, 2025; Sebullen & Jimenez, 2024). Understanding how administrators make sense of support plans, the tensions they navigate, and the organizational realities that constrain their work is essential to improving these systems. This study centers that perspective, offering insight into the complex decision-making administrators undertake as they attempt to balance accountability demands with instructional growth, all while operating under resource limitations and policy pressures that shape what support can realistically look like in practice. The rich narrative data captured through interviews revealed complexity and nuance that surveys or policy analysis alone could not uncover, providing access to administrators' reasoning, values, frustrations, and adaptive strategies as they worked to support underperforming teachers within constrained organizational environments.

The integration of interview and artifact data represents a methodological strength that enhanced the credibility and interpretive depth of this study. Triangulation through multiple data sources allowed for cross-validation between what administrators described in interviews and what was formalized in written support plan documents (Meydan & Akkaş, 2024). Interviews yielded rich narrative accounts of the reasoning, values, and challenges that informed administrative decision-making, while document analysis as reported by the principals provided concrete evidence of how those stated practices were operationalized in policy language, monitoring structures, and accountability mechanisms. This dual approach revealed both consistencies and tensions across data sources. For instance, administrators frequently emphasized coaching and collaboration in interviews, and those same elements appeared prominently in support plan artifacts through references to modeling, co-teaching, and instructional coaching cycles. At the same time, document analysis as reported by the principals exposed aspects of the support process that were less emphasized in interviews, including procedural compliance language and consequences for noncompliance. By examining both what administrators said and what they documented, this study captured a more complete picture of how support plans function as both developmental tools and regulatory instruments, illuminating the relationship between stated intentions and formalized practices.

The study's analytic process was rigorous, transparent, and theoretically grounded, strengthening the dependability and confirmability of findings. A multi-stage coding procedure combined deductive and inductive approaches, beginning with first-cycle coding anchored to the three research questions and followed by pattern coding that identified cross-cutting themes across administrator narratives (Bingham, 2023). Each coded segment was entered into a cross-case analytic matrix that aligned research questions with emergent themes, allowing for

systematic comparison of perspectives and the identification of patterns that recurred across contexts. Verbatim excerpts were retained and labeled by the participant to preserve traceability and ensure that findings remained grounded in the data. The use of Vygotsky's sociocultural framework, particularly the concepts of the Zone of Proximal Development and the More Knowledgeable Other, provided a coherent interpretive lens through which to examine scaffolding, mediation, and social interaction within support plan processes. This theory-driven approach enabled the researcher to move beyond surface description and analyze how administrators conceptualized teacher growth, the role of targeted instruction in advancing competence, and the relational dynamics that either facilitated or constrained learning within the support plan context.

The findings of this study offer practical relevance and applicability for practitioners working to improve teacher support systems. Administrators' accounts highlighted real challenges that resonate across school contexts, including time constraints, documentation demands, limited staffing, and teacher resistance to feedback. These are not abstract or theoretical concerns but lived realities that shape how support plans are designed, delivered, and experienced. The study also surfaced actionable insights regarding support plan design and implementation. Administrators consistently emphasized the importance of anchoring plans in clear instructional standards, embedding multiple layers of coaching and modeling, maintaining frequent walkthroughs and feedback cycles, and attending to teacher mindset and buy-in as central to plan success. These insights have direct implications for policy and practice, suggesting that effective support requires not only written plans but sustained relational work, organizational capacity to provide ongoing coaching, and systems that allow administrators to respond flexibly to teacher needs rather than merely enforcing procedural compliance. The

findings thus provide a foundation for rethinking how districts structure, resource, and evaluate teacher support initiatives in ways that honor both accountability and growth.

Limitations

This study provides meaningful insights into administrators' experiences with teacher support plans, but several important boundaries shape the interpretation and application of these findings. Acknowledging these limitations strengthens the study's contribution by clarifying what can and cannot be claimed based on the evidence collected.

The study examined administrator perspectives within a single urban school district in one southern state operating under the T-TESS evaluation framework. While this focused scope enabled depth of analysis, it also constrains the extent to which findings transfer beyond this particular organizational and policy context. Districts employing different evaluation systems may structure support plans with alternative criteria, timelines, or accountability mechanisms that produce divergent administrator experiences. Similarly, suburban or rural settings may present distinct resource landscapes, staffing configurations, or union dynamics that alter how support plans function in practice. The study's participant pool consisted exclusively of administrators who had successfully placed teachers on support plans, which introduces a form of selection bias. Leaders who chose not to implement formal plans perhaps relying instead on informal coaching or avoiding documentation altogether are absent from the dataset. This gap means the findings reflect the perspectives of administrators willing to engage the formal support process rather than the full range of leadership responses to underperforming teachers. Additionally, while the range of administrative experience across participants varied from one to fifteen years, this distribution may not capture perspectives from either very new administrators

still developing evaluative judgment or highly seasoned leaders with decades of experience navigating personnel systems.

The study relied primarily on administrator self-report through semi-structured interviews, which introduces inherent constraints on what could be observed and understood. Administrators may have emphasized developmental aspects of support while underreporting practices perceived as punitive, reflecting social desirability bias common in self-reported data (Short et al., 2009). While administrators described their intentions, processes, and beliefs, the study did not access teachers' lived experiences of being placed on support plans or their perceptions of whether these interventions felt supportive or evaluative. This absence of teacher voice represents a significant limitation, particularly given that teacher mindset emerged as a central theme shaping plan effectiveness. Without direct testimony from teachers, the study cannot verify whether support plans were experienced as scaffolded development or punitive oversight, nor can it assess whether the coaching and feedback described by administrators translated into meaningful instructional shifts in classroom practice. The use of single interviews per participant further limited temporal understanding. Administrators were asked to reflect on processes that unfolded over weeks or months, but their accounts were captured at a single point in time. Longitudinal data or follow-up interviews conducted after support plans concluded might have revealed shifts in administrator thinking, changes in district policy implementation, or evolving understandings of what constitutes effective support.

This study focused specifically on teachers identified as struggling and placed on formal support plans, which represents a narrow segment of the broader professional development ecosystem within schools. The research did not examine how districts support proficient or highly effective teachers, nor did it explore whether similar scaffolding principles inform

development opportunities for educators across performance levels. Consequently, the findings cannot illuminate whether the tensions and structures identified here are unique to remediation contexts or reflect broader patterns in how instructional leadership operates within accountability systems. The study was grounded exclusively in sociocultural theory, with particular emphasis on Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development as a lens for understanding support structures. While this framework provided valuable insight into scaffolding, mediation, and developmental progression, other theoretical perspectives might illuminate dimensions not foregrounded by this approach. For example, critical theory could draw attention to issues of power, equity, and whose teaching practices are deemed deficient within evaluation systems. A focus on organizational theory might foreground how institutional structures and policy mandates shape administrator discretion and decision-making. The choice of framework inherently privileges certain interpretive possibilities while leaving others unexplored. Finally, the study focused on process rather than outcomes. It examined how administrators designed, implemented, and monitored support plans, but it did not measure whether these interventions led to improved student learning or sustained changes in teacher practice over time. Without outcome data, claims about plan effectiveness remain grounded in administrator perception rather than empirical demonstration of instructional or academic impact.

The researcher's background as an educator likely shaped the interpretation of administrator narratives in ways both enabling and constraining (Lynch, n.d.). Insider knowledge of school contexts, evaluation systems, and instructional frameworks facilitated a nuanced understanding of the challenges administrators described and the technical language they used. However, this same familiarity may have led to assumptions about practice that went unquestioned during data collection or analysis. While reflexivity practices were employed

throughout the study to surface and interrogate these assumptions, complete objectivity remains impossible in qualitative research (Lynch, n.d.). The interpretive process necessarily reflects the researcher's professional experiences, values, and frames of reference. Additionally, power dynamics inherent in administrator-researcher interactions may have influenced what participants felt comfortable sharing. Administrators may have been reluctant to discuss failures, ethical dilemmas, or moments when institutional pressures conflicted with their beliefs about teacher development, particularly if they perceived the interview as an evaluative space rather than a confidential research conversation.

Together, these limitations clarify the boundaries within which this study's findings should be understood. The research offers a detailed, contextualized account of how administrators in one district conceptualize and enact teacher support plans, but it does not provide generalizable claims applicable across all settings, evaluation systems, or organizational contexts. Findings may not transfer to districts with different policy environments or union structures (Stuart et al., 2018). The reliance on administrator self-report means the study captures intended practices and espoused beliefs more reliably than it captures enacted reality or teacher experience. The absence of longitudinal data, teacher perspectives, and student outcome measures limits claims about effectiveness or sustainability. Yet these constraints do not diminish the study's contribution. By honestly acknowledging what was and was not examined, the research establishes a foundation for future inquiry that might address these gaps through mixed methods designs, longitudinal tracking, or inclusion of teacher voice alongside administrative perspective.

This study addressed trustworthiness through multiple strategic approaches despite inherent methodological constraints. Credibility was established through triangulation of

interview and document data, allowing cross-verification of administrators' narratives against formalized support plan artifacts (Stahl & King, 2020). Rich, thick description enabled readers to assess the authenticity of findings, while verbatim quotations provided transparent evidence of participant perspectives. A systematic audit trail documented analytic decisions from raw data to interpreted themes. Transferability was supported through detailed descriptions of context, participants, and procedures, enabling readers to assess applicability to similar educational settings. While findings cannot be statistically generalized, they may resonate with administrators navigating comparable organizational conditions and instructional leadership challenges. Dependability was strengthened through systematic coding procedures documented in Appendix D, with consistent application of research questions and thematic frameworks throughout analysis. This methodological consistency allowed for replicable analytic processes across the dataset. Confirmability was maintained by grounding all findings in participant data rather than researcher speculation, with multiple voices representing a range of experiences across elementary and secondary contexts. Together, these trustworthiness criteria demonstrate that while qualitative research does not aim for replicability, it can achieve rigor through transparent procedures, evidence-based interpretation, and acknowledgment of the researcher's role in meaning-making.

Future Research

Multi-Stakeholder and Longitudinal Designs

Research extending teacher support plans beyond administrators' perspectives requires deliberately capturing teachers' lived experiences and tracking implementation trajectories over time. Teachers who participate in research are influenced by the process regardless of involvement depth, and belonging to the research community can support reflection in ways that

align with their vision as practitioners (David & Zoch, 2015). This suggests that paired administrator-teacher studies could reveal critical divergences between administrative intentions and teacher sense-making, particularly around whether support plans are experienced as developmental or punitive. Teachers value trusting relationships with researchers that emerge from philosophical alignment, while lack of trust can produce defensive or unwilling participation that impacts both practice and research (David & Zoch, 2015). Such dynamics mirror the mindset and buy-in challenges administrators described in the present study, raising questions about whether teacher resistance stems from plan design, relational trust, perceived fairness, or factors beyond mindset alone.

Longitudinal designs tracking support plans from initiation through conclusion and beyond would address persistent questions about implementation fidelity, sustainability of improvement, and teacher retention. Teachers emphasize that inadequate planning disrupts lesson flow and diminishes instructional quality, while robust planning bolsters classroom management and provides flexibility to adapt to unexpected situations (Dursun & Aykan, 2025). Extending this insight, case studies following teachers across a full academic year could illuminate how plans evolve in response to teacher progress or resistance, whether timelines match intended pacing, and what happens after plans conclude sustained improvement, regression, or professional exit. Building teacher motivation is essential, as motivated teachers are better equipped to employ creative and diverse strategies in lesson planning (Dursun & Aykan, 2025), suggesting that longitudinal data could reveal whether support structures foster or erode motivation over time. Additionally, readiness for change is not just a precursor but a set of ongoing supports essential throughout the change process (Mitra et al., 2025), indicating that longitudinal studies could track how cognitive mindsets, emotional heartsets, and skillsets

develop or plateau across implementation stages. Together, multi-stakeholder and longitudinal approaches would provide a more complete, humanized account of how support plans function, not as static interventions but as dynamic relational processes, embedded within teachers' professional identities and institutional contexts.

Instructional and Student Outcome Studies

Research examining whether teacher support plans translate into measurable instructional improvement remains critically underdeveloped. While administrators in the document analysis study consistently anchored support plans to evaluation rubrics and employed coaching structures, empirical evidence linking these interventions to actual teaching practice changes is largely absent. Zhang et al. (2025) demonstrated that perceived teacher support positively predicts students' learning approaches, with teachers' process-oriented instruction promoting metacognitive activities and higher-level thinking among students. This suggests that when support plans successfully enhance instructional quality, downstream effects on student learning strategies may occur. However, the cross-sectional design employed by Zhang et al. (2025) limits causal interpretations, underscoring the need for longitudinal studies that track teachers from support plan initiation through implementation and beyond. Future research should employ quasi-experimental designs with propensity score matching to compare teachers on support plans against matched comparison groups, utilizing validated observational frameworks to assess specific instructional dimensions such as questioning quality and differentiation. Video analysis conducted before, during, and after support plan implementation would provide granular evidence of whether coaching intensity, timeline duration, and specific intervention components predict instructional gains, addressing the critical gap between formalized support structures and verified improvements in classroom practice.

The relationship between teacher improvement efforts and student outcomes represents an even more pressing research frontier, particularly regarding equity implications. Zhang et al. (2025) found that students from backgrounds with traditionally lower access to educational resources particularly valued emotional support from teachers, which significantly correlated with their preference for deep learning strategies, aligning with Personal Investment Theory's proposition that perception of support greatly influences engagement in learning tasks. This raises critical questions about whether students in classrooms of teachers on support plans experience equitable access to effective instruction during the improvement process. Sørli et al. (2016) observed significant positive effects on school staff efficacy and behavior management practices following implementation of the school-wide N-PALS model, with substantial increases in positive behavior-supporting strategies. However, their study revealed discrepancies between staff and student ratings of disciplinary practices, suggesting that changes in teachers' practices may be too slight to be noticed by students, or students may not be sufficiently sensitive to changes in behavioral feedback amounts. Future research must examine student achievement growth in classrooms of teachers on support plans, disaggregated by race, socioeconomic status, English learner status, and special education identification, employing value-added models and interrupted time series designs. Additionally, equity audits should examine which teachers are disproportionately placed on plans by demographic characteristics and certification pathway, ensuring support systems promote rather than undermine equitable student access to quality instruction.

Contextual and Comparative Studies

Future research must examine how broader contextual forces shape the design, implementation, and outcomes of teacher support plans. This study's findings emerged from a

single urban district operating under T-TESS evaluation policies, yet the literature suggests that support plan practices vary considerably across policy environments, resource levels, and collective bargaining contexts (Goldhaber et al., 2015). Cross-district and cross-state comparative studies could illuminate how different evaluation frameworks such as Danielson, Marzano, or state-developed systems, influence the specificity of performance expectations and the rigor of monitoring protocols embedded in support plans. Additionally, examining high-capacity versus low-capacity districts would clarify whether resource availability affects administrators' ability to provide the layered instructional support identified as central to plan effectiveness in this study. States with strong collective bargaining protections or right-to-work legislation may exhibit different levels of procedural formality, documentation intensity, and teacher resistance, as union presence was noted by participants as an external influence that could delay or complicate plan implementation. Multi-site comparative case studies and policy analyses could reveal whether the standards-driven, coaching-intensive approach observed here is replicable across contexts or whether systemic constraints render it context-dependent.

Building on these cross-district comparisons, school-level organizational culture represents another critical mediating factor warranting systematic investigation. Research suggests that schools with strong professional communities and high relational trust are more likely to frame evaluation and support processes as developmental rather than punitive (Javornik & Klemenčič Mirazchiyski, 2023). Comparative case studies of high-trust versus low-trust schools could reveal whether the same support plan structures yield different outcomes depending on organizational culture. Furthermore, examining differences between elementary and secondary settings, where departmentalization and scheduling structures vary, would clarify how school-level infrastructure shapes administrators' capacity to deliver consistent coaching

and monitoring. The impact of principal turnover on plan continuity also merits attention, as leadership transitions may disrupt the relational scaffolding central to Vygotskian support frameworks. Multilevel modeling approaches that nest teachers within schools could quantify how much variance in support plan success is attributable to school-level versus individual-level factors, advancing understanding of the organizational conditions necessary for support plans to function as genuine tools for instructional growth.

Alternative Theoretical and Methodological Approaches

Future research examining teacher support plans through critical and equity-oriented lenses would illuminate power dynamics, surveillance mechanisms, and disparities that remain invisible in administratively focused studies. Such an inquiry would investigate whether support plans function primarily as managerial control mechanisms or as genuine professional development tools, examining how documentation requirements, monitoring protocols, and evaluative language position teachers as subjects of institutional surveillance rather than autonomous professionals (Çeven et al., 2021). Critical race theory and culturally responsive evaluation frameworks could expose whether teachers of color are disproportionately placed on support plans, how deficit-based versus asset-based language shapes plan design, and the extent to which racialized assumptions about competence influence administrative decision-making. Wright and Haswell's community cultural wealth model offers a productive counterpoint to deficit thinking, demonstrating how shifting from deficit to asset framing can positively affect teacher motivation and belonging principles equally applicable to how administrators conceptualize underperforming teachers. Foucauldian perspectives on surveillance and discipline would further illuminate how support plans function as normalizing instruments that define

acceptable teaching performance while producing docile bodies through constant observation and hierarchical judgment (Çeven et al., 2021).

Complementing critical perspectives, implementation science and systems thinking approaches would treat support plans as complex organizational interventions requiring systematic investigation of implementation drivers, barriers, and sustainability mechanisms across multiple system levels. Reardon et al. (2025) described how the Consolidated Framework for Implementation Research (CFIR) provides structured guidance for examining implementation determinants, including organizational readiness, leadership engagement, resource allocation, and the compatibility between support plan structures and existing district policies. Implementation fidelity studies could assess whether support plans are enacted as designed or whether they drift in practice due to time constraints, competing priorities, or insufficient administrator training—concerns clearly articulated by participants in the present study who described systemic constraints as shaping their capacity to deliver consistent coaching. Cost-effectiveness analyses would examine resource investment relative to improvement outcomes, addressing whether the intensive monitoring, coaching, and documentation required by support plans yields measurable gains in instructional quality and student learning sufficient to justify the expenditure.

Systems thinking frameworks would map how support plan effectiveness depends not solely on individual teacher characteristics but on interconnected factors, including district evaluation policies, school culture, principal turnover, union contracts, and availability of instructional coaches, recognizing that interventions targeting one system component may produce unintended consequences elsewhere. Social network analysis examining coaching and support relationships could identify whether teachers on support plans receive genuine

collaborative assistance or remain isolated from peer learning networks, while process tracing methodologies would illuminate implementation pathways that differentiate successful from unsuccessful support trajectories across varied organizational contexts.

The present study's documentation of administrators' perspectives on support plan design, implementation challenges, and monitoring practices establishes a foundation upon which future research can build through methodological diversification, stakeholder inclusion, and explicit attention to equity and outcomes. Research extending beyond administrative viewpoints must deliberately incorporate teachers' lived experiences, recognizing that teachers participating in research are influenced by the process in ways that can support reflection aligned with their professional vision (David & Zoch, 2015), while also acknowledging that lack of trust between teachers and researchers can produce defensive participation that compromises both practice and findings. Multi-method, multi-perspective designs combining administrator interviews, teacher narratives, document analysis as reported by the principals, classroom observations, and student outcome data would provide more complete accounts of how support plans function as dynamic relational processes rather than static procedural interventions. Longitudinal tracking from plan initiation through conclusion and beyond would address questions about implementation fidelity, sustainability of improvement, and whether teachers remain in the profession following support plan completion, outcomes obscured by cross-sectional designs.

Mitra et al. (2025) emphasized that readiness for change requires ongoing support throughout the change process, not merely initial preparation, suggesting that research must examine how cognitive mindsets, emotional dispositions, and practical skillsets develop or plateau across implementation stages. Ultimately, research centering equity must investigate whether support systems promote or undermine equitable student access to quality instruction,

examining which teachers are disproportionately placed on plans by demographic characteristics and whether students in their classrooms experience diminished learning opportunities during improvement efforts. Such inquiry serves practitioners by generating actionable knowledge about conditions that enable support plans to function as tools for instructional growth rather than mechanisms of surveillance and control.

Implications for Practice

For School and District Leaders

The findings reveal that effective teacher support plans depend fundamentally on administrators' capacity to anchor expectations in clear, observable instructional standards while simultaneously providing layered, sustained coaching. The document analysis as reported by the principals confirmed that all ten support plans explicitly referenced T-TESS domains and dimensions, translating evaluative language into actionable classroom targets. However, administrators consistently reported that written plans alone proved insufficient. Theme B emerged across all research questions, underscoring that modeling, co-teaching, and peer observation functioned as the mechanisms through which standards became meaningful in practice. Carvalho et al. (2022) demonstrated that plan quality depends not merely on comprehensiveness but on implementation processes, noting that strategic plans often become "a description or a list of actions" rather than tools supporting genuine instructional change. School leaders must therefore invest in coaching infrastructure that extends beyond compliance documentation. This means allocating protected time for multiple walkthroughs, ensuring coaches maintain manageable caseloads, and calibrating leadership teams to apply standards consistently. As Moore et al. (2024) found, school leaders rated ongoing consultation and coaching as both the most important and most feasible implementation strategies, yet

administrators in this study identified time constraints as a primary barrier. Leaders should resist the temptation to streamline support into procedural checklists and instead prioritize direct instructional assistance, even when organizational demands create pressure to reduce face-to-face coaching time.

Building on this infrastructural foundation, administrators must also attend to the relational and temporal dimensions that shape whether support plans function as developmental tools or punitive measures. Theme D: teacher mindset, buy-in, and perceptions of support emerged as a mediating factor across all stages of the support process. Participant 5 distilled this dynamic succinctly, stating that the success or failure of any plan ultimately hinges on "the teacher's mindset," particularly when defensiveness surfaces early in the process. Grillo and Kier (2021) documented how teachers who experience validation and success within supportive community networks are more likely to maintain commitment to challenging instructional contexts, suggesting that administrators should cultivate growth-oriented school cultures before teachers require formal intervention. Beginning support conversations early before performance concerns escalate, reduces the likelihood that plans will be perceived as punitive. Administrators should explicitly frame support as developmental from the first conversation, solicit teacher input on needed supports (as modeled by Participant 1 and Participant 10), and monitor their own language for alignment with growth rather than deficit orientations. Additionally, Moore et al. (2024) emphasized that inner-setting factors such as the implementation climate and the relative priority significantly influence whether evidence-based practices are adopted. Leaders must therefore examine whether their broader school culture normalizes instructional experimentation, peer collaboration, and iterative improvement or whether it inadvertently reinforces teacher isolation and fear of evaluation. When trust and psychological safety are established school-

wide, individual support plans become extensions of collective learning rather than isolated episodes of remediation.

For Policy Makers

At the policy level, the tensions revealed in Theme C on systemic constraints and organizational friction demand that state and district leaders critically examine whether evaluation policies provide adequate time and resources for authentic support processes. Administrators across all ten interviews described procedural burdens, compressed timelines, and external pressures (including union involvement) that complicated their ability to deliver sustained coaching. Carvalho et al. (2022) argued that templates and guidelines, while ostensibly supportive, can constrain strategic thinking and reduce principals' autonomy in tailoring plans to school-specific contexts. State timelines mandating specific numbers of observations or days for improvement may misalign with the iterative, relationship-dependent nature of instructional change. Policymakers should therefore build flexibility into evaluation frameworks, recognizing that Vygotskian principles of scaffolded support, central to this study's theoretical framework, require time for teachers to move through their zones of proximal development. This means funding instructional coaching positions at ratios enabling individualized support, providing release time for peer observation and collaborative planning, and supporting administrator professional learning on coaching and feedback. Furthermore, accountability systems must be audited for unintended consequences: when high-stakes evaluation creates punitive climates, even well-designed support plans become tools of compliance rather than growth.

Beyond resource allocation, equity considerations must inform how policymakers monitor and regulate the use of teacher support plans. The disaggregation of data examining which teachers are placed on support plans by race, experience level, school context, and

assignment is essential to identifying potential bias in identification processes. Moore et al. (2024) noted that school leaders' perceptions of implementation strategies may vary by role, setting, and prior experience, suggesting that administrators' decisions about which teachers require support may reflect implicit biases or differential expectations. Policymakers should require districts to regularly audit support plan data for patterns of inequitable application, particularly in high-need schools where systemic challenges compound individual instructional struggles. Grillo and Kier (2021) found that teachers in high-need schools who possessed identities as social justice advocates and teacher-researchers, supported by strong community networks, were more likely to remain committed to their work. This suggests that support systems must account for contextual factors rather than treating all instructional deficits as individual failings. Additionally, policymakers should consider how state policies might inadvertently incentivize reactive rather than proactive support. Arslan Dönmez and Sahin (2022) demonstrated that peer-coaching practices require training on non-evaluative feedback, adequate time allocation, and environments of trust conditions unlikely to flourish when evaluation systems emphasize high-stakes consequences over continuous improvement. Research-practice partnerships that generate evidence about effective support structures within diverse school contexts should inform future policy iterations, ensuring that state mandates align with the realities administrators and teachers face daily.

Conclusion

This study explored school administrators' perspectives on the design and implementation of support and growth plans for underperforming teachers, addressing a significant gap in educational leadership literature. By centering the administrative voice, this research revealed the complex interplay between instructional expectations, leadership practices, organizational

constraints, and teacher sense-making that shapes the enactment of support plans in real school contexts. Grounded in Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, the study demonstrated how support functions as a scaffolded, relational process situated within broader systemic realities. The findings underscore that teacher quality remains the primary in-school factor affecting student learning, and administrators serve as key actors in teacher development whose perspectives have been historically overlooked. This study matters because support plans represent a critical intersection where accountability meets growth, revealing that effective support requires more than good intentions as it demands systemic capacity, relational trust, and organizational coherence that extends beyond individual interventions into institutional culture.

The document analysis as reported by the principals complemented interview findings by revealing how administrators' conceptualizations of support were operationalized into formal structures governing daily practice. Across all ten support plans examined, instructional standards, coaching structures, documentation requirements, and behavioral expectations were codified through written procedures that defined how support was delivered, monitored, and evaluated. This consistency reinforced cross-cutting themes identified in interviews, particularly the centrality of standards alignment, layered instructional support, organizational constraints, and teacher mindset. The artifact matrix illustrated that support plans functioned simultaneously as instructional guides designed to scaffold teacher growth, accountability mechanisms documenting performance deficiencies and improvement timelines, and legal protections establishing procedural compliance should termination become necessary. By triangulating interview narratives with documentary evidence, the study demonstrated that teacher support plans are not merely individualized interventions but components of broader organizational systems balancing instructional improvement with accountability and procedural control.

These findings carry significant implications for educational leadership practice and policy. Administrators must invest in coaching infrastructure that extends beyond compliance documentation, allocating protected time for walkthroughs, ensuring manageable coach caseloads, and calibrating leadership teams to apply standards consistently. Equally important, leaders must attend to relational and temporal dimensions, cultivating growth-oriented school cultures where support conversations begin early, before performance concerns escalate, reducing the likelihood that plans are perceived as punitive. Policymakers should build flexibility into evaluation frameworks, recognizing that Vygotskian principles of scaffolded support require time for teachers to move through zones of proximal development. This means funding instructional coaching positions enabling individualized support, providing release time for peer observation and collaborative planning, and auditing accountability systems for unintended consequences.

Final Reflections: The Paradox of Support

This study illuminates a fundamental tension embedded within teacher support plans: they function simultaneously as instruments of accountability and vehicles for professional growth. Administrators across all ten campuses demonstrated genuine commitment to helping teachers improve, evidenced through their emphasis on coaching relationships, modeling instruction, and collaborative problem-solving. Yet these same plans operate within institutional systems designed for surveillance, documentation, and compliance. The artifacts analyzed in this study make this duality explicit; documents contain termination language and signature requirements alongside descriptions of coaching cycles and professional learning. This paradox is not incidental but structural, reflecting broader tensions within accountability-driven

educational systems that must balance evaluation with development, judgment with support, and institutional protection with human growth.

Within this complex landscape, teacher mindset emerges as a critical reminder of human agency that sophisticated systems cannot override. Administrators consistently identified teacher willingness, openness, and self-awareness as pivotal factors determining whether support plans succeeded or failed. This recognition reveals professional wisdom: growth cannot be mandated through documentation or enforced through rubrics. Leaders can design clear expectations, provide expert coaching, allocate time for collaboration, and monitor progress rigorously, yet these structural supports only enable improvement when teachers perceive the process as fair, trust the intentions behind it, and choose to engage authentically. When the elements align, standards clarity, adequate resources, skilled coaching, supportive organizational culture, and teacher readiness support plans function as genuine scaffolding within Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development. When misaligned, they collapse into procedural compliance exercises that consume administrator time, generate defensiveness, and produce minimal instructional change. This study reveals what administrators know and do, but the challenge now extends beyond individual campuses: building systems that support leaders in this inherently complex, deeply relational work. Teacher quality matters too profoundly to accept perfunctory support structures. Investment in well-designed, adequately resourced, relationally grounded teacher development is ultimately an investment in the students these educators serve.

Closing Statement

The ten administrators in this study demonstrated unwavering commitment to teacher growth while navigating significant organizational constraints, limited time, documentation demands, and the emotional complexity of addressing underperformance. Their experiences

reveal both the possibilities and limitations of support plans as tools for instructional improvement. Moving forward requires systemic commitment that extends beyond individual leadership effort: adequate time allocated for meaningful coaching, robust instructional infrastructure that distributes support across multiple personnel, coherent expectations aligned across evaluation systems and professional learning, and school cultures that genuinely embrace growth rather than merely compliance. The voices captured here remind us that supporting teachers is complex, relational work that cannot be reduced to paperwork, checklists, or bureaucratic procedure. When enacted well with adequate resources, genuine commitment to development, and trust between administrators and teachers, support plans can help educators move through their Zone of Proximal Development toward greater instructional effectiveness, benefiting not only the teachers themselves but ultimately the students whose learning depends on the quality of instruction they receive daily.

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Appendix A - Interview Questions

Interview questions for participants:

Please share your background and experience as an administrator, including your years in education, experience in administration, and the grade levels you have worked with.

Background and Role

1. Can you describe your current role and responsibilities as a school administrator?
2. How have your responsibilities evolved over the years, particularly in relation to instructional leadership and teacher support?

Identifying Underperforming teachers

3. What criteria do you use to identify underperforming teachers?
4. Can you walk me through the process you follow once a teacher is identified as low-performing?
5. How do you ensure that the identification process is fair and objective?

Designing Support Plans

6. What are the key components of a support plan for underperforming teachers?
7. How do you tailor support plans to meet the specific needs of individual teachers?
8. Can you provide an example of a successful support plan you have implemented?

Implementation and Challenges

9. What are the main challenges you face when implementing support plans for underperforming teachers?
10. How do you address resistance from teachers who may be reluctant to accept support?
11. How do you balance the need for accountability with the need to provide support?

Impact and Outcomes

12. How do you measure the effectiveness of the support plans?
13. What impact have these support plans had on teacher performance and student outcomes?
14. Can you share any success stories where a teacher significantly improved due to the support provided?

Professional Development and Growth

15. How do you incorporate professional development into the support plans?
16. What role does ongoing mentorship play in supporting underperforming teachers?
17. How do you foster a culture of continuous improvement among your staff?

Reflection and Insights

18. What have you learned from your experiences in supporting underperforming teachers?
19. How do you see the role of school administrators evolving in the future?
20. What advice would you give to new administrators about supporting underperforming teachers?

Appendix B - Interview Protocol

STEP 1:

Welcome and Overview of Purpose of Interview and Protocol (2-3 minutes)

Hello, and thank you for participating in this one-on-one interview. I am Claudia Jacobo Martinez, a doctoral student at Kansas State University. My research focuses on the development and impact of teacher support and support plans. I aim to investigate the challenges, tensions, and opportunities for growth from an administrator's perspective. Your insights will be invaluable to this important conversation.

I will be facilitating the interview and would like to record our conversation. This will help me stay focused and ensure an accurate record of our discussion. After creating the transcripts from the recording, I will carry out two additional steps to further enhance our discussion.

The researcher will kindly invite participants to share any additional information that may enhance the understanding of the questions posed. Participants may also find it beneficial to schedule a follow-up conversation, either by phone or email, to clarify or elaborate on their responses from the initial interview. This opportunity for discussion can also take place during a second follow-up meeting.

Secondly, the researcher will ensure the audio recording is deleted. The typed transcripts will be securely stored on a password-protected computer for a period of five years. Participants are welcome to withdraw from the study at any time, should they wish to do so. If you have any questions or require clarification, please don't hesitate to ask. Shall we proceed?

STEP 2: Introduction (2-3 minutes)

Please share your background and experience as an administrator, including your years in education, experience in administration, and the grade levels you have worked with.

STEP 3: Twenty Questions Posed to Participants (2 – 2.3 minutes per question)

1. Background and Role
2. Can you describe your current role and responsibilities as a school administrator?
3. How have your responsibilities evolved over the years, particularly in relation to instructional leadership and teacher support?
4. Identifying Underperforming teachers
5. What criteria do you use to identify underperforming teachers?
6. Can you walk me through the process you follow once a teacher is identified as low-performing?
7. How do you ensure that the identification process is fair and objective?
8. Designing Support Plans
9. What are the key components of a support plan for underperforming teachers?
10. How do you tailor support plans to meet the specific needs of individual teachers?
11. Can you provide an example of a successful support plan you have implemented?
12. Implementation and Challenges
13. What are the main challenges you face when implementing support plans for underperforming teachers?

14. How do you address resistance from teachers who may be reluctant to accept support?

15. How do you balance the need for accountability with the need to provide support?

16. Impact and Outcomes

17. How do you measure the effectiveness of the support plans?

18. What impact have these support plans had on teacher performance and student outcomes?

19. Can you share any success stories where a teacher significantly improved due to the support provided?

20. Professional Development and Growth

21. How do you incorporate professional development into the support plans?

22. What role does ongoing mentorship play in supporting underperforming teachers?

23. How do you foster a culture of continuous improvement among your staff?

Reflection and Insights

1. What have you learned from your experiences in supporting underperforming teachers?

2. How do you see the role of school administrators evolving in the future?

3. What advice would you give to new administrators about supporting underperforming teachers?

STEP 4: Closing Question (3-5 minutes)

Is there anything you would like to share that I didn't ask?

STEP 5: Thank participants, recap next steps, and member check (2-3minutes)

Following the one-on-one interview, the audio recording will be transcribed to accurately capture the responses. To ensure clarity and to confirm that participants expressed their thoughts as intended, I will conduct member checking through email or phone communication. If necessary, I can also arrange a second follow-up interview to clarify any points further. This process aims to enhance the quality and reliability of our findings.

Thank you so much for your participation. Your insights are invaluable, and I appreciate the time you've taken to share them. If you have any further questions or need support, please don't hesitate to reach out to me via email at cbjacobo@ksu.edu or on my cell phone at 817-703-7291. I genuinely value your contributions to education and your support for this research study. Wishing you a wonderful rest of the school year and take care!

Appendix C - Participant Recruitment Letter

Subject: Invitation to Participate in Doctoral Research on Teacher Support and Growth Plans

Dear [Administrator's Name],

My name is Claudia Berenice Jacobo Martinez, and I am a doctoral candidate in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at Kansas State University. I am conducting a qualitative research study as part of my dissertation titled *Exploring Administrator Perspectives on Designing and Implementing Support and Growth Plans for Underperforming teachers*.

The purpose of this study is to explore administrator perspectives on the design and implementation of support and growth plans for underperforming teachers, with particular attention to the challenges, tensions, and opportunities for teacher development. I am seeking 9 to 11 school administrators from the Southern United States who meet the following criteria:

- At least 10 years of experience in education
- Experience creating and implementing support plans. Experience with teacher evaluation and professional development

Participants will be asked to take part in a one-on-one Zoom interview lasting approximately 60 minutes. Your insights will be confidential, and your identity will remain anonymous in all published results. Demographic data such as years of experience, school level, gender, and race/ethnicity will be collected to better understand patterns across diverse backgrounds, while ensuring your privacy is protected.

If you are interested in participating or would like more information, please reply to this email. Your voluntary participation would be greatly appreciated and will contribute meaningfully to understanding how administrators support teacher growth.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Claudia Berenice Jacobo Martinez
Doctoral Candidate, Ed.D. Program
Department of Curriculum and Instruction
Kansas State University
cbjacob@ksu.edu
817-703-7291

Appendix D – Thematic Coding Process

DATA ANALYSIS AND CODING PROCESS: FROM IMMERSION TO THEMES

Thematic Analysis Process Flow: Immersion → First-Cycle Coding → Second-Cycle Pattern Coding → Matrix Analysis

Analysis Phase	Process Description	Coding Dimension	Data Source	Code/Pattern	Theme Emerged	Theoretical Connection	Example
PHASE 1: Immersion	Read all 10 interview transcripts in full to develop familiarity with narratives, leadership contexts, and instructional environments	Holistic reading	Interview transcripts (n=10)	Meaning units identified	Preliminary patterns noted	Social Constructivism lens	Identified segments about teacher support plans, instructional leadership, organizational constraints, teacher growth
PHASE 2: First-Cycle Coding (Deductive)	Applied deductive coding using three research questions as analytic anchors	RQ1: Components	Meaning units	Features and components of support plans	Standards alignment emerging	MKO role; Scaffolding	P4: "I go off the T-TESS rubric... dimensions that we focus on... T-TESS dimension 2.1"
		RQ1: Components	Meaning units	Coaching structures	Layered support emerging	MKO; Scaffolding; Social Interaction	P1: "We go in there and model... co-teach... finding those mentors"
		RQ2: Challenges	Meaning units	Alignment issues between ratings and data	Standards tension	ZPD assessment	P1: "If we're saying proficient but the data doesn't reflect it, we are missing something"

		RQ2: Challenges	Meaning units	Time limitations; union involvement	Systemic constraints	Organizational context affecting scaffolding	P8: "Outside influences... call the union... puts a stop on it"
		RQ3: Execution	Meaning units	Walkthroughs; data reviews; rubric monitoring	Standards-based monitoring	ZPD progress tracking	P3: "The rubric is the Bible... matching goals in action plan with future observation"
		RQ3: Execution	Meaning units	Coaching cycles; modeling; peer visits	Sustained support structures	Scaffolding; MKO guidance	P3: "Visiting other classrooms, coaching conversations, working with peers, PLCs"
PHASE 2: First-Cycle Coding (Inductive)	Simultaneously coded inductively for cross-cutting thematic patterns across contexts	Cross-cutting patterns	Same meaning units	T-TESS domains; rubrics; clear expectations	Standards alignment pattern	Social Constructivism: clear learning targets	P7: "Clear directives, timelines, and measurable goals aligned to T- TESS domains"
		Cross-cutting patterns	Same meaning units	Modeling; co- teaching; mentors; district coaches	Coaching/support pattern	MKO role across contexts	P3: "Request coaches from district to model a lesson... that's when I see most improvement"
		Cross-cutting patterns	Same meaning units	Limited time; paperwork; competing demands	Constraint pattern	Barriers to scaffolding	P4: "Hardest thing is... too much paperwork... help teacher grow within the school day"
		Cross-cutting patterns	Same meaning units	Defensiveness; resistance; self- awareness	Mindset pattern	Readiness for ZPD work	P5: "Success or lack of success... that's the teacher's mindset... defensiveness"

PHASE 3: Second-Cycle Pattern Coding	Examined relationships across first-cycle codes to identify consistent cross-cutting themes	Pattern synthesis	First-cycle codes	Instructional rubrics; evaluation frameworks; measurable goals	THEME A: Standards Alignment and Clarity of Expectations	Social Constructivism: ZPD requires clear targets	Consistent references to T-TESS dimensions, rubrics, observable indicators across all 10 participants
		Pattern synthesis	First-cycle codes	Modeling; mentoring; coaching; peer observation; co-teaching	THEME B: Coaching, Modeling, and Layered Instructional Support	MKO and Scaffolding in practice	All participants described multi-layered support structures beyond written plans
		Pattern synthesis	First-cycle codes	Time limits; staffing; documentation; external pressures	THEME C: Systemic Constraints and Organizational Friction	Barriers to effective scaffolding and social interaction	Organizational conditions shaped implementation capacity across campuses
		Pattern synthesis	First-cycle codes	Buy-in; openness; self-evaluation; resistance; beliefs	THEME D: Teacher Mindset, Buy-in, and Perceptions of Support	Learner disposition within ZPD	Teacher receptiveness influenced whether support functioned as growth opportunity or punitive measure
PHASE 4: Matrix Analysis	Created cross-case analytic matrix aligning 3 research questions × 4 themes	RQ1 × Theme A	All coded segments	Standards-based components	Standards Alignment (RQ1)	Clear expectations enable ZPD work	Matrix cell contained verbatim excerpts from P4, P7, P10 about T-TESS frameworks
		RQ1 × Theme B	All coded segments	Coaching as component	Layered Support (RQ1)	MKO providing scaffolding	Matrix cell: P1, P2, P3 quotes about modeling, co-teaching, mentors

		RQ2 × Theme C	All coded segments	Implementation barriers	Constraints (RQ2)	Organizational limits on support	Matrix cell: P2, P8, P9 about time, unions, documentation requirements
		RQ3 × Theme B	All coded segments	Execution through coaching	Sustained Support (RQ3)	Ongoing scaffolding in action	Matrix cell: P1, P3, P7, P10 about walkthroughs, modeling, adjustments
		Matrix verification	Support plan artifacts	Document analysis confirmed interview themes	All 4 themes validated	Theory-practice alignment	Artifact matrix showed standards anchors, coaching structures, monitoring, compliance in all 10 plans

FINAL THEMATIC FRAMEWORK: Four Cross-Cutting Themes Grounded in Social Constructivism

Theoretical Alignment	Main Theme	Definition	Subcodes	Example
Social Constructivism: ZPD - Clear learning targets MKO - Administrator guidance	Theme A: Standards Alignment and Clarity of Expectations	Support plans anchored to formal evaluation frameworks (T-TESS) with explicit, measurable instructional criteria defining improvement targets	T-TESS domains; Rubric indicators; Walkthroughs; Student work; Data alignment; Observable criteria	P4: "I go off the T-TESS rubric... areas that yield highest impact are dimensions we focus on... dimension 2.1, achieving student expectations"
Social Constructivism: MKO - More knowledgeable other Scaffolding - Graduated support	Theme B: Coaching, Modeling, and Layered Instructional Support	Direct instructional assistance through modeling, co-teaching, mentoring, and peer observation rather than relying solely on written feedback	Modeling lessons; Co-teaching; District coaches; Campus coaches; Peer mentors; PLCs; Coaching	P1: "We go in there and model... co-teach... modeling for teachers how to best do it... finding those

Social Interaction - Collaborative learning			conversations; Rehearsals	mentors they can go to for support"
Social Constructivism: Organizational barriers to scaffolding and social interaction	Theme C: Systemic Constraints and Organizational Friction	Structural and procedural conditions that shape implementation including time limitations, staffing capacity, documentation demands, and external influences	Limited time; Competing demands; Paperwork; Professional development constraints; Union involvement; Policy requirements; Documentation burden	P4: "Hardest thing is trying not to make it too much paperwork... thinking how can I help this teacher grow within the school day, within the time we have"
Social Constructivism: Learner readiness for ZPD work; Receptiveness to scaffolding	Theme D: Teacher Mindset, Buy-in, and Perceptions of Support	Teachers' beliefs, openness to feedback, self-awareness, and willingness to engage shape whether support plans function as growth opportunities or punitive measures	Defensiveness; Resistance; Openness; Self-evaluation; Buy-in; Growth mindset; Veteran resistance; Perceived fairness; Trust	P5: "I have narrowed it down to one thing on success or lack of success of any plan, and that's the teacher's mindset... whenever there's defensiveness"