

Bridging the leadership gap: Perceptions of onboarding and support among first-year principals
in the South

by

Guadalupe Cortez

B.A., Texas Wesleyan University, 2002
M.S., Texas Wesleyan University, 2007

AN ABSTRACT OF A DISSERTATION

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

Department of Curriculum and Instruction
College of Education

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
Manhattan, Kansas

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Abstract

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Approved by:

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Acknowledgements

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the individuals who have supported me throughout my journey to complete this dissertation study. First and foremost, I extend my deepest appreciation to my committee chair, Dr. Shabina Kavimandan. Dr. K, thank you for your invaluable feedback, unwavering confidence, and steadfast support. Your guidance enabled me to persevere and complete this study. I am especially grateful for the time you invested in understanding my strengths and my areas of opportunity, and for consistently challenging me to become the best version of myself—not only as a scholar, but as a person. I also wish to thank the members of my committee: Dr. Ambyr Rios, Dr. Augustine-Shaw, and Dr. Eileen Wertzberger. Your expertise and encouragement were instrumental as I conducted this important research on new principals. Dr. W and Dr. Rios, I am particularly appreciative of your feedback during coursework, which introduced me to new strategies for supporting principals. These strategies have had a direct impact on the campuses I serve, contributing to significant improvements in student achievement on previously low-performing campuses.

To my “adopted sister” Claudia, thank you for your constant encouragement and for keeping me organized during the busiest times!

To the new principals who participated in this study and the induction program, I am deeply grateful for your willingness to share your experiences and perspectives. This research would not have been possible without your time and commitment.

Finally, to my family: my father (who is in heaven), mother, husband, son, siblings Amelia, Role, Jr, and Nate-I appreciate your patience and encouragement, which allowed me to pursue and achieve this goal, even when it meant missing many family events.

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated first and foremost to my God Almighty, whose presence and guidance sustained me throughout this journey. To my husband, Ricardo—thank you for your unwavering support, for taking on the responsibilities of our home, and for ensuring that I had the time and space to focus on my studies. Your love and partnership made this achievement possible. To my son, Vladimir—thank you for your understanding, patience, and resilience. Your quiet strength and willingness to share our time, even when it meant missing a soccer practice or game, inspired me every step of the way. To my mother, Ortensia—your unconditional love and care for Vladi during my busiest moments gave me peace of mind and allowed me to pursue this goal wholeheartedly. To my sister, Amelia, and my brothers, Junior, Nate, and Role—thank you for your constant encouragement and belief in me. Your support has meant the world. Finally, to my beloved father, Manuel—my guardian angel in heaven. His courage and sacrifice in immigrating to this country with nothing but hope and determination laid the foundation for the opportunities I have today. His legacy lives on in every step I take. This accomplishment is as much his as it is mine. With love and gratitude, I share this milestone with each of you! THANK YOU!!!

Chapter 1: Introduction

Across the United States, particularly in the Southern United States, principal turnover has presented a significant challenge in our education system. The National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) conducted research in 2023 that revealed that principals serve an average of just four years, with even shorter tenures in high-poverty schools. This is a concerning turnover rate. Fuller and Young (2009) conducted research that demonstrated that principal retention is particularly problematic in early stages, with only about half of new principals remaining at their schools after three years. On a national scale, Dilberti and Schwartz's (2023) study for the Rand Corporation indicated that approximately 20% of Principals depart annually, with disadvantaged schools experiencing even higher turnover rates. This instability carries substantial financial implications. According to the Wallace Foundation, the estimated costs of replacing a principal range between \$75,000 to even \$200,000 per instance. In addition, the same researchers highlighted those students in districts with carefully chosen, well-trained, and supported principals performed better in reading and math compared to their peers.

School Leadership

School leadership has a positive influence on instructional quality (Bellibas et al., 2020). Beyond this, research illustrates that effective leaders make a significant difference when it comes to school improvement and student academic achievement (Howley-Rouse, 2021; Leithwood et al., 2019). However, there is limited research that provides details as to how school leaders impact student learning (Panindranauth, 2023). Despite decades of school reform initiatives, there remains a lack of clear understanding of how leadership influences student learning, the extent of that influence, and the key components of effective leadership (Leithwood

et al., 2004; The Wallace Foundation, 2015). More recently published scholarship on the topic reveals that similar research gaps persist. Tan et al. (2024) highlighted that there is a significant effect of leadership on student learning; however, further research is needed to understand the nuanced ways in which leadership practices impact different student outcomes.

The role of a principal extends beyond administrative duties; it encompasses being a visionary, a mentor, and a catalyst for change. Effective principals create a positive school culture, foster professional development among teachers, and engage with the community to build strong partnerships (Panindranauth, 2023). These elements are crucial in creating an environment where students can thrive academically and socially. Additionally, research has shown that principals who prioritize instructional leadership, by setting clear educational goals, monitoring lesson plans, and providing feedback, can significantly enhance the quality of teaching and learning in their schools (Grissom et al., 2021). This hands-on approach ensures that the school's vision for student success is consistently implemented and refined.

Further research supports the critical role of school leadership in student achievement. For instance, a comprehensive review of literature by Gamage et al. (2009) found that effective school leaders develop climates and cultures that motivate both students and teachers, leading to better teaching and learning environments. Similarly, Tan et al. (2024) emphasized the significance of various leadership practices, including instructional management, teacher capacity building, and engaging external stakeholders, in improving student outcomes. Another study by Leithwood et al. (2008) identified four key leadership actions that positively impact student outcomes: building vision and setting direction, developing staff member's capacity, redesigning the organization to align the vision, and managing the teaching and learning program. Moreover, numerous studies have highlighted that school leadership behaviors

indirectly affect student achievement through variables such as teacher collaboration, classroom instruction, and parental involvement (Leithwood et al., 2019; Tan et al., 2024; Witziers et al., 2003). This means interventions that are evidence-based for creating better principals should in turn create better schools. This justifies continued research on school leadership development. These findings underscore the multifaceted role of principals in driving school success.

Background

To accurately frame the relationship between principal leadership and school performance, understanding the background of what and how new principals are being prepared for the workplace is necessary to consider. Investigation of the influence of school leadership on student achievement highlighted that school leadership is the second most influential school-related factor impacting student learning, surpassed only by classroom instruction (Leithwood et al., 2004). Given the significant role of principals, second only to teachers, effective principal induction programs are crucial for school districts. The following information examines the support and training initiatives for new principals from a Southern United States perspective.

According to the Local Education Agency (LEA, n.d.), the Local Principal Evaluation and Support System (LPESS) defines the standards by which some Southern United States principals are assessed. These standards include five domains. First, Instructional Leadership focuses on the principal's role in securing high-quality instruction for all students through a challenging curriculum, effective instructional practices, data-driven instruction, and maximized learning opportunities. Second, Human Capital emphasizes the principal's work in establishing an effective teacher and staff team through focused selection, professional development, collaboration, and systematic feedback. Third, Executive Leadership accentuates the principal's dedication to enhancing student results through perseverance, ongoing learning, powerful

communication, and ethical practice. Fourth, School Culture deals with developing a shared vision and high expectations for staff and students, building family and community involvement, and providing a secure and orderly environment. Lastly, Strategic Operations deals with the principal’s capacity to establish clear goals, monitor progress, and use resources strategically to enhance teacher effectiveness and student performance continually through strategic planning, optimized learning time, and efficient policy implementation (LEA, n.d.).

While some school districts in the Southern United States have principals’ standards, the state being discussed does not have a set of guidelines regarding the induction of new principals. This is relatively common, however. Only about half of U.S. states have formal principal induction requirements. As it stands, 23 states have introduced principal induction requirements as either a state rule, state law, or both. The remaining states, , are left to the discretion of individual districts (Fitz & Levin, 2023). The Large Urban School District (LUDD, so named to protect the confidentiality of the districts’ members) has 134 principals. During the 2023-2025 school year, out of these principals, 15 were new principals and two were new to the district, but not new to principalship. The LUDD is one of the seven largest in the Southern United States. The LUDD is composed of the demographics presented in Table 1.1, according to Wang and others in a report published in 2023 (Wang et al., 2023).

Table 1.1

Student Enrollment by Ethnicity

Ethnicity	Percentage
Hispanic/Latino	65-70%
Black/African American	19-22%
White	10-12%
Asian	1-3%

Two or more races	1-3%
American Indian/Alaskan	<1%
Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	<1%

Given these demographics, many schools in the LUDD tend to have high needs. More than half of the schools received a rating of a D or an F on the state accountability system, although the accountability ratings have been on hold since the 2018-19 school year (EdTrust, 2024). As a result, new principals must be provided with support to ensure they are able to meet the needs of the students, staff, and community.

The LUDD began the first induction program for new principals in the 2022-2023 school year with new principals attending a one-day academy focused on leadership. In the 2023-2024 school year, principal supervisors decided to implement an induction program for new principals that included four sessions, held throughout the year (LEA, n.d.). The information shared was based on feedback given by new principals. Guidelines for a new Induction program were not utilized, and many new principals are assistant principals in the LUDD. However, after working with assistant principals and principals for a few years and in different capacities, few if any of the professional learning focus on helping school leaders with instructional practices and operational items aimed at increasing student achievement. School administrators are now expected to be instructional leaders as well as continue the operational side of running the school building-the CEO of the school. However, in the LUDD, one out of seven school principals leave the profession every year (Wang et al., 2023). School administrators who lead campuses need to have the skills to provide best teaching practices to teachers and the operational and managerial skills to run an effective school. Not only do principals need to have the necessary skills to facilitate positive impacts on school performance, but they also need to have the time to develop

their own skill sets and the time to initiate meaningful and evidence-based reforms and interactions. When principals leave a district before these elements can be achieved, the new administrators coming in are essentially starting over. As a result, maintaining skilled administrators in their positions is as important as training them.

Problem Statement

Despite the critical role of principals in shaping student outcomes, the LUDD faces a significant challenge with principal attrition, as one out of every seven new principals leaves within their first year (LEA, n.d.). This high turnover rate is likely driven by a variety of factors, and the purpose of this study is to explore the perceptions of new principals regarding the district's onboarding and induction program. It is important to note that the LUDD's turnover rate for principals in the first year, at 14.29%, is slightly lower than the national average. Data suggests that approximately 18% of new principals in the U.S. leave their positions after just one year and 50% leave within the first three years (Levin & Bradley, 2019). As it stands, principal turnover rates are high in general and not specific to the LUDD. By examining the strengths and weaknesses of the current LUDD induction practices, this study aims to better understand how the program may contribute to principal retention. Given the connection between principal stability and student achievement (Leithwood et al., 2019), addressing these issues is crucial for fostering leadership continuity and improving educational outcomes in the district. There are additional links to principal turnover and teacher turnover, with Buckman (2021) finding that retaining principals can help reduce teacher turnover rates in schools. When teachers have significant burnout or leave the profession, it has a negative impact on student academic achievement and student motivation (Madigan & Kim, 2021). The aim of exploring new principals' perceptions of the induction program directly ties into the central problem of

leadership turnover, making it an integral part of the solution for improving principal retention and, by extension, student achievement.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of first-year principals regarding the district's onboarding and induction program. It was important to understand the factors that influence principal retention, and success to developing effective induction programs (Rangel, 2018). Examining the experiences of new principals with induction practices provided insight into the attrition rates occurring in the LUDD. Ultimately, the study made recommendations for onboarding and support for new principals, assessed policies and procedures, and helped new principals remain in the LUDD. The findings from this research provided actionable insights into how principal induction practices can be improved to better support new leaders in the district. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, a large body of research focused on teacher attrition with little attention being placed on principal attrition (Taie & Lewis, 2023). By analyzing the factors that contribute to principal satisfaction, efficacy, and retention, the study offered a deeper understanding of the systemic challenges faced by new principals, particularly within the context of the LUDD's unique needs and demographics. This understanding facilitated the development of targeted recommendations to enhance onboarding processes, professional development opportunities, and mentorship programs. To better inform the established purpose, the study examined existing district policies and procedures to assess their alignment with the needs of new principals and the overall goals of school improvement. Ultimately, the goal was to establish a framework for long-term success that not only reduces attrition but also strengthens leadership capacity, ensuring that new principals are equipped to foster a positive and impactful school culture while driving student achievement.

Research Questions

The following is the guiding research question that was used to explore how current principal induction practices in the South help new principals:

Q1: *How do newly appointed school principals in a school district in the Southern United States describe their experiences and perceptions of their onboarding and support experiences during their first year in the role?*

This guiding research question was further informed by the following subquestion:

S1: *What do new principals identify as the strengths and areas for improvement in the New Principal Induction Program?*

Conceptual Framework

Effective leadership is grounded in a critical perspective of school policies, practices, and procedures, as well as a deep understanding of the cultural norms, values, and expectations of students' families (Leithwood, 2021). This study explored how newly appointed school principals describe their experiences and perceptions of their onboarding and support as school leaders in their first year. This study employed two primary theoretical frameworks: transformational leadership theory (Bass, 1985) and theory of change in education (Meyer-Looze et al., 2023). Transformational leadership is rooted in the work of Burns (1978) and later expanded by Bass (1985). It emphasizes leaders who inspire, motivate, and intellectually stimulate followers to exceed expectations and embrace collective goals. In a research context, transformational leadership can help explain how effective leaders foster a shared vision, model desired behaviors, and empower others to grow and adapt. This framework is particularly useful in education, healthcare, and nonprofit sectors, where leadership plays a central role in influencing morale, innovation, and outcomes. By focusing on the relational and motivational

aspects of leadership, transformational leadership theory provides a lens for analyzing how leaders navigate complex environments, address resistance to change, and build capacity within their teams. It supports inquiry into both leader behavior and follower response, making it a dynamic model for qualitative research. The theory of change framework complemented this approach by illuminating the sequential processes and systemic conditions necessary for effective organizational transformation in educational settings.

Other leadership styles considered for the conceptual framework included distributive leadership, instructional leadership, and culturally responsive leadership. Distributive leadership theory highlights how leadership responsibilities are shared among team members for collaborative decision-making (Spillane & Lee, 2014). It is important to note that distributive leadership theory shares many similarities with participative leadership and democratic leadership, but it is a distinct concept with its own unique characteristics. Instructional leadership theory acknowledges the principal's role in improving teaching and learning outcomes by overseeing curriculum alignment, resource allocation, and professional development (Hallinger & Heck, 2010). Culturally responsive leadership theory centers on how leaders address the needs of diverse stakeholders through recognizing cultural identities and ensuring inclusive practices within schools (Gay, 2002; Gooden et al., 2023). While these theories are important, they were not as useful as transformational leadership theory for this study due to the connections between transformational leadership and organizational change. In times of change, transformational leaders who serve as principals can carry out the mechanisms of change identified by Reinholz and Andrews (2020). These include identifying needs within the context, engaging the stakeholders, and linking actions to improved educational experiences.

Based on the elements of transformational leadership and its application to principal success, this framework helped me better understand principal induction using this theory.

Research Methods

This research study employed an interpretative qualitative inquiry method. This research method is commonly used to understand how people make meaning of their experiences. It focuses on subjective perspectives, exploring how individuals interpret, construct, and give meaning to their social world (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The research questions centered on how newly appointed principals described their onboarding and support experiences, including the strengths and areas for improvement in the New Principal Induction Program during their first year.

To collect data, the study employed semi-structured interviews and document analysis. Eight new principals from the 2023-2024 cohort of the New Principal Induction Program were interviewed, with potential additional participants to ensure data saturation. The study also included an analysis of relevant documents, such as presentations and materials from the induction program, which provided additional insights. Semi-structured interviews offered consistency across participants while allowing for flexibility to probe deeper into the experiences of the principals (Yin, 2018).

Data analysis involved a thematic exploration, in which interviews and documents were coded to identify recurring themes. The documents, which included agendas, presentations and district-provided post-session surveys completed by the participants after attending sessions of the New Principal Induction Program, were stored in a Google Drive that all principal supervisors had access to, and the researcher gained access by asking authorization to obtain the files from the drive. Thematic analysis allowed for insights into the effectiveness of the induction

program and the participants' perceptions of its strengths and weaknesses was established. Triangulation, member checking, and peer review were used to enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The study also acknowledged potential biases, such as the small sample size, which may limit generalizability. By identifying the specific content and structures that the new principals found most beneficial, the study provided valuable recommendations for district leaders seeking to improve principal retention and foster effective leadership in schools serving diverse communities.

Definition of Terms

The following terms had a significant meaning for the qualitative research that I engaged in:

- *Catalyst for Change*: Someone who initiates and drives positive changes within the school organization (Howley-Rouse, 2021).
- *Collaborative Team Meetings*: Meetings where educators collaborate and work together to plan and improve instructional practices (The Wallace Foundation, 2015).
- *Data-Driven Instruction*: Teaching methods and decisions that are guided by the student performance data (Bolz & Madhavan, 2024).
- *Economically Disadvantaged (ED)*: This term refers to students who come from low-income families and may require additional support to succeed academically (LEA, n.d.).
- *Induction Program*: A structured program designed to support new principals as they transition into their new role (LEA, n.d.).
- *Instructional Practices*: Methods and techniques used by teachers to facilitate learning (Howley-Rouse, 2021).

- *Mentor*: An experienced principal who provides guidance and support to less experienced principals (Panindranauth, 2023).
- *Principal Preparation Programs* - -any program that prepares leaders to become principals. These may be universities or region-based programs that help those interested in becoming principals become certified in school administration (The Wallace Foundation, 2015).
- *Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)*: The process of having a group of educators who meet regularly to collaborate to improve teaching practices (The Wallace Foundation, 2015).
- *School Culture*: The shared beliefs, values, and practices that shape the environment and behavior within a school (Panindranauth, 2023).
- *Local Principal Evaluation and Support System (LPESS)*: The standards and evaluation system used in Texas to assess principal performance (LEA, n.d.).

Significance of the Study

As it stands, teachers have a negative view of the U.S. K-12 education system. Lin et al. (2024) found that 82% of teachers say that the overall state of public schools in the nation has gotten worse in the last five years. Only 5% believe it has improved and 11% believe it has remained the same (Lin et al., 2024). Additionally, 53% believe that it will get worse in the next 5 years with only 1 in 5 educators believing it will get better (Lin et al., 2024). There is data to substantiate the concerns of these educators; however, the data on U.S. school performance and spending presents an imperfect picture. Despite the concerns expressed by teachers, the challenge lies in reconciling these perceptions with the complexities of educational performance

and funding, which require a more nuanced understanding of the factors influencing the system (Lin et al., 2024).

There are some misconceptions about where U.S. schools rank globally versus how much the nation spends on education. Specifically, the U.S. spends 22% more than the OECD average on education; however, it was below countries like Norway, Austria, South Korea, The Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, and Australia (U.S. Education Spending, 2024). It is also important to note that there are some nations that achieve superior educational outcomes despite lower spending levels (U.S. Education Spending, 2024; U.S. Student Performance, 2022). In terms of disparities, average test scores between poor and non-poor students are widening (Matheny et al., 2023). In total, the data suggests that there is considerable room for school improvement in the country. As has been highlighted throughout the chapter, principals have an impact on school performance.

As a result, it is of the utmost importance that administrators receive the proper training prior to beginning the principalship. Data from a research study conducted by Bottoms and Fry (2009) showed that principals have a significant, albeit indirect, impact on student learning. Their influence on teacher quality, through hiring, support, and professional development, makes principals the second most important school-level factor affecting student achievement. Data from the LUDD shows that 1 in 4 principals are not remaining in leadership roles in the LUDD (LEA, n.d.). For principals to be successful, school districts should adopt an induction program that aims at preparing new principals to lead.

One way of attracting and retaining principals is through creating local pipelines focusing on induction or mentoring of principals. Local Education Agencies (LEA's) are responsible for creating local pipelines focusing on induction or mentoring of principals. The LUDD does not

currently have a local pipeline to help new principals. Pennsylvania's system for LEA/school improvement identified three school districts in states across the U.S. that have a program focusing on induction, coaching, and mentoring (Jochim, 2016). These school districts are the Hillsborough County Public Schools in Florida, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools in North Carolina, and Gwinnett County Public Schools in Georgia (Jochim, 2016). Currently, 29 states fund statewide professional learning opportunities for educational leaders, with many of them developing leadership pipelines for aspiring principals (Fitz & Levin, 2023). Information from these districts can be used to compare the strengths and the failures of the LUDD as established by this study.

Researcher Perspective/Assumptions/Bias

In any research, it is essential to acknowledge the presence of researcher bias, as it can shape how data is interpreted and conclusions are drawn (Galdas, 2017). Researchers bring their own perspectives, values, and experiences to the study, which can inadvertently influence their approach to data collection, analysis, and interpretation. Bias can arise from personal beliefs about the research topic, expectations about the outcomes, or prior experiences that shape how the researcher understands the data (Galdas, 2017). For example, a researcher with a strong belief in the effectiveness of a certain program may focus more on data that supports this view and overlook data that challenges it. This would be equivalent to confirmation bias. Additionally, cultural, social, or academic backgrounds can influence the questions asked, the way the participants are engaged, and how responses are perceived. To reduce the impact of these biases, I endeavored to remain self-aware, utilize multiple data sources, and employ strategies like member checking and triangulation to ensure a comprehensive and balanced analysis.

In terms of specific bias, I am a product of a school district with similar demographics as the LUDD, and I was an assistant principal and principal in a district with similar demographics. During my years on different campuses within the school district, I always had higher results on the state assessments than other principals in schools with similar demographics. Sometimes this would occur in schools with even greater percentages of students who were considered of low socioeconomic status. I did not participate in an induction program, yet I was considered a principal with a successful first year. Therefore, I have a bias that induction programs may not correlate with success. To this end, I endeavored to remain as objective as possible and continue to observe my thoughts throughout the study.

At the time of the study, the researcher was employed as a Principal supervisor for 11 elementary campuses that reflect demographic characteristics similar to those of the LUDD. This professional role may introduce positional bias, as experiences within comparable school settings can influence interpretations of the data. However, the researcher did not hold any supervisory authority or direct professional relationships with the participating principals, helping to mitigate the potential for role-related bias.

Chapter Summary and Overview of the Study

This chapter outlined the introduction to the problem, the purpose of the research study, the research questions, the methodology that will be utilized, the significance of the study, and the assumptions and biases of the researcher. By analyzing the perspectives of the impact of new principal preparation programs correlated to leadership mentoring and support, the LUDD will determine the strengths of the induction program and areas that need to be improved in the induction program that help new principals be successful. Chapter Two examines the existing

literature on principal preparation programs and new principal induction programs. Chapter Three discusses the methodology and design used in the study. Chapter Four analyzes the data obtained from the interviews and from principals who participated in the induction program and relevant documents such as presentations and induction guidelines. Last, Chapter Five concludes the study by using all findings to direct changes and facilitate policies and procedures to better support new principals in the LUDD and elsewhere.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Chapter Overview

This literature review examined research published to provide a contemporary perspective on new principal induction. The review focused on four key areas related to principals' experiences:

1. The impact of induction programs on new principal satisfaction and efficacy.
2. The relationship between principal leadership and teacher satisfaction and retention.
3. The influence of principal effectiveness on student achievement.
4. The impact of induction programs on culturally responsive leadership.

By synthesizing current research in these areas, this review identified best practices in new principal induction and highlights areas where further research is needed. Understanding the perspectives of new principals regarding existing induction programs is particularly valuable, as it can inform district leaders in their efforts to design and implement more effective support systems for school leaders.

The findings of this literature review have potential implications for educational policy, district-level leadership development programs, and the broader field of educational administration. By examining the interplay between principal induction, leadership effectiveness, and school outcomes, this review contributes to the ongoing dialogue about how best to prepare and support the next generation of school leaders. Delving into the existing literature, it is important to note that while every effort has been made to provide a comprehensive overview, the limited research specifically focused on new principal induction programs may necessitate drawing insights from related fields and extrapolating findings where appropriate. This approach will help to identify potential areas for future research and provide a foundation for

understanding the critical role of principal induction in the broader context of educational leadership and school improvement.

Defining School Leadership

The role of school principals in shaping educational outcomes has gained increasing attention in recent years, particularly considering the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and ongoing concerns about teacher attrition. While much research has focused on teacher preparation and support, there is a notable gap in the literature regarding the induction and support of new principals. This literature review explores the current landscape of new principal induction programs and their impact on various aspects of school leadership and performance. For the purposes of this review, "new principal induction programs" or "principal preparation programs" are defined as structured support systems designed to assist newly appointed principals in transitioning into their leadership roles. These programs typically include mentoring, professional development, and networking opportunities tailored to the unique challenges faced by novice school leaders (Amin et al., 2023).

The importance of effective school leadership cannot be overstated. As Doleh (2024) noted, the role of a principal is complex and involves much more than administrative duties. As instructional leaders, principals play a key role in shaping the learning environment, and research over the past 20 years shows that leadership is the second most influential factor, after classroom instruction, in determining student learning outcomes (Doleh, 2024). This underscores the critical need for comprehensive support systems for new principals, who must quickly adapt to the complex demands of their position.

Taie and Lewis (2023) found that although teacher attrition has been widely studied, especially in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, principal attrition has garnered

comparatively little research. This gap is notable, considering the crucial role principals play in shaping school culture, supporting teachers, and driving student achievement. Understanding the factors that influence principal retention, and success is essential for creating effective induction programs, which can ultimately enhance overall school performance (Rangel, 2018). While defining the scope and importance of school leadership provides necessary background, understanding how these responsibilities function in practice requires a closer examination of the evolving role of school administrators. The following section reviews how principals' responsibilities have shifted over time and how these shifts influence the need for structured induction.

Review of the Literature

The Role of School Administrators

The role of school administrators has undergone a significant transformation in recent decades, shifting from a primarily managerial function to that of an instructional leader. Grissom et al. (2021) highlighted the various changes, including high-stakes accountability, multiple-measure teacher evaluation systems, and increased focus on educational equity, have shifted expectations for educational leaders. The researchers contend that these changes influence not only the knowledge leaders must possess but also how they allocate their time and the outcomes they aim to achieve (Fitz & Levin, 2023). This shift reflects a growing recognition of the principal's critical role in shaping educational outcomes (Grissom et al., 2021). As school districts develop induction programs for new principals, it is essential that instructional leadership be a core component. The shift in the principal's role from manager to instructional leader necessitates a corresponding shift in how new principals are prepared and supported.

Research supports this need for focused preparation in instructional leadership (Fitz & Levin; Grissom et al., 2021; Rangel, 2018).

Alvy and Robbins (2016) conducted a research study that focused on new principals. The study revealed that new principals often feel overwhelmed by the managerial aspects of their role, leaving little time for instructional leadership. This is problematic in that Simon (2023) found that principals impact student achievement and educational opportunities through empowering staff and facilitating inclusive environments. Managerial and clerical aspects of the principal's position are not as impacting on instructional leadership. The burdens identified by new principals are significant to the extent that nearly half of new principals leave after three years and nearly 20% leave every year (Simon, 2023). Alvy and Robbins (2016), building on earlier published studies, found that induction programs can help principals balance managerial tasks with instructional leadership responsibilities. This balance is crucial for school improvement and student achievement. Furthermore, Amin et al. (2023) argued that new principal induction programs should be tailored to the specific context of the school and district. The research indicates that effective induction programs include:

1. Mentoring from experienced principals with strong instructional leadership skills
2. Professional development focused on curriculum, instruction, and assessment
3. Opportunities to observe and analyze effective instructional practices
4. Training in data analysis and use for instructional decision-making

While the emphasis on instructional leadership has intensified in recent years, its importance was recognized as early as 1980. Cotton and Savard's (1980) study of seven elementary schools found that elementary school principals who actively engage in instructional leadership positively impact student academic achievement. This early research laid the groundwork for

current expectations of principals as key drivers of instructional quality and student achievement. Every school's mission is to deliver high-quality education by applying research-based strategies that support both student achievement and overall school success (Belcher, 2024). These expanded leadership responsibilities do not occur in isolation; they are embedded within high-stakes accountability structures that heighten the demands placed on new principals. Understanding these systems is critical for analyzing why induction programs must include explicit support for instructional leadership.

Accountability Measures and Their Impact

The increased focus on instructional leadership is closely tied to the implementation of high-stakes accountability systems. In parts of the Southern United States, for example, schools are rated on an A-F scale based on various performance measures. Much of the Southern United States school systems have been sustained by the work of Goldring et al. (2018). The researchers concluded that district-level focus on instructional leadership can enhance principal effectiveness, which is critical for improving student achievement (Goldring et al., 2018). This aligns with the Local Administrative code, thereby making it evidence-based in nature. The Local Education Agency (LEA) outlines one state's accountability system in the 2024 Accountability Manual.

According to the 2024 Accountability Manual, elementary and middle school ratings are primarily determined by student performance on the Local Assessments of Academic Readiness (LAAR), which measures mastery of the Local Essential Knowledge and Skills curriculum standards in grades third through eighth grades. High schools are evaluated on LAAR performance (End of course Algebra I, English I, English II, Biology, History), graduation rates, and students' college, career, or military readiness. The Local Administrative Code (LAC)

Chapter 241 outlines the requirements for the “Principal as Instructional Leaders Certificate.” The policy emphasizes the importance of instructional leadership in response to accountability measures such as the LAAR assessment.

As outlined in TAC Chapter 241, principals are required to show proficiency in instructional leadership to earn and maintain their certification. Furthermore, the commissioner’s Rules Concerning Educator Standards (Chapter 149) state that principals are accountable for ensuring high-quality instruction and student achievement. Specifically, Chapter 149 states that principals have to “prioritize instructional leadership, develop rigorous curricula aligned with state standards, and use data to drive instructional decisions” (p. 41). These policies highlight the necessity for principals to have a comprehensive grasp of curriculum, teaching methods, and assessment techniques to effectively support and lead their instructional teams.

These accountability measures have intensified the pressure on principals to directly impact instructional quality and student outcomes. As a result, principals are now expected to possess a deep understanding of curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment practices to effectively support and guide their teaching staff. Consequently, principals must also use data-driven strategies to monitor progress and ensure continuous improvement in both teaching and learning (Goldring et al., 2018; Nnorom et al., 2023). Accountability structures make instructional leadership non-negotiable; however, research indicates that many new principals feel underprepared in this area. This gap highlights the importance of identifying the skills essential for effective leadership.

Required Skills for Instructional Leadership

The evolving role of principals necessitates specific skill sets. Backor and Gordon (2015) highlighted that the principal holds the primary responsibility for making instructional decisions

at the campus level, which necessitates an understanding of state and district standards, research on school climate that supports student learning, and pedagogical expertise. This underscores the need for principals to be well-versed in educational theory and practice, capable of engaging in meaningful conversations with teachers about instructional strategies and student learning.

Summarizing Backor and Gordon (2015) and Amin et al. (2023), to effectively coach teachers, principals must be able to:

1. Analyze classroom instruction and provide constructive feedback
2. Interpret and utilize student performance data to guide instructional decisions
3. Facilitate professional development opportunities aligned with school goals
4. Foster a collaborative school culture focused on continuous improvement

By developing these skills, principals can more effectively fulfill their role as instructional leaders, ultimately contributing to improved teaching practices and enhanced student learning outcomes. Furthermore, Amin et al. (2023) emphasized the importance of instructional leadership in teaching and student learning. This supported the conclusions of an earlier study conducted by Hallinger and Heck (2010). In total, effective leadership has a positive impact on student learning. As a result, principals must have the skills or learn practices that will allow them to support teachers in improving their teaching and learning. The Wallace Foundation's (2015) report on school leadership emphasizes that districts should view principal induction as a multi-year process. They recommend that induction programs provide ongoing support in developing instructional leadership skills, rather than just focusing on the immediate challenges of the first year.

Incorporating instructional leadership into induction programs can have significant benefits. Grissom et al. (2021) found that principals who receive targeted support in instructional

leadership during their early years are more likely to spend more time on instructional tasks, provide more effective feedback to teachers, make more informed decisions about professional development, and have a greater impact on student achievement. However, it is important to note that simply including instructional leadership in induction programs is not enough. The quality and depth of this component matter. Thessin and Clayton (2013) emphasized the importance of authentic, job-embedded learning experiences that allow new principals to practice and refine their instructional leadership skills in real-world contexts. By prioritizing instructional leadership in new principal induction programs, districts can better prepare their school leaders to meet the complex demands of their roles, improve principal retention and improve student outcomes. Beyond shaping instructional quality, the skills principals bring into their roles directly influence staff morale and organizational continuity. This connection becomes clear when considering the relationship between principal retention and teacher retention.

Principal Retention and Teacher Retention

Stability in school leadership fosters a more consistent and supportive environment for teachers, which in turn enhances teachers' commitment to stay at their school. This underscores the importance of effective principal induction programs. Rangel (2018) found that principals often leave the profession within a year of assuming their role due to inadequate preparation and professional development. The study highlighted that high-quality preparation programs, which thoroughly prepare principals for challenging schools, are linked to better principal retention. This includes providing professional learning, mentoring, and coaching opportunities that support principals' ongoing development and growth. Additionally, Education Resource Strategies (2023) confirmed that the number of teachers returning to a district increased when the

same principals remained in the school. Each year without principal turnover saw higher percentages of returning teachers.

When the principal is stable, the culture and climate are stable, and this positively impacts a teacher's decision to stay or leave (Education Resource Strategies, 2023). Buckman (2021) made similar conclusions related to the role of principal turnover on influencing teacher turnover. For example, Bêteille et al. (2012) found that teachers are 17% more likely to leave in the year following a principal's departure. In accordance with these findings, the exploratory analyses by Jacob et al. (2015) concluded that teachers were less likely to leave their schools if their principal remained in place. Henry and Harbatkin (2019) assert that principal turnover due to voluntary departures is associated with an increase of 1.7 percentage points in teacher turnover. The continuity provided by long-term principals likely contributes to a positive school culture and effective instructional practices, further encouraging teacher retention.

The Impact of Induction on New Principal Satisfaction

New principals who participate in a new principal induction programs are more satisfied and feel more prepared than those who do not participate in a new principal induction program. Multiple studies across various contexts support this claim, offering insights into the specific benefits of these programs. Correll (2010) conducted research focused on the job satisfaction and school context. This study focused on principals in high-poverty schools, a particularly challenging environment for school leaders. The research indicated that principals in these settings were more likely to report job satisfaction if they had participated in specific components of induction programs. Susilowati (2021) confirmed that induction programs were central to new principals transitioning into the role so their respective schools could remain competitive. In the Correll (2010) study, data from early career principals nationwide during the

2003-2004 school year was examined. He found that over half of the new principals participated in some form of induction. Among these principals, 32% reported higher career satisfaction as a result of the induction process. Additionally, 24% felt more satisfaction if the induction program included having a mentor. Correll (2010) also concluded that these dynamics were magnified among principals in high poverty school districts.

After engaging in an induction program, Tekir (2021) concluded that new principals have acquired greater knowledge of essential aspects of effective leadership, which has helped them feel more prepared to perform their duties, create positive learning environments for all students, and manage the various challenges of being a new principal. This underscores the potential of targeted induction efforts to support leaders in challenging school contexts. Ma et al. (2024), focusing on knowledge and skill development of new principals, found that induction programs helped new principals gain knowledge of effective practices, making them feel more prepared to fulfill their roles and responsibilities as school leaders. This increased sense of competence is crucial for new administrators facing the complex demands of school leadership. Ma et al. (2024) additionally concluded that induction programs resulted in principals feeling more capable of establishing positive learning environments in their respective schools. This ability is fundamental to creating successful educational outcomes for all students and speaks to the broader impact of well-prepared school leaders.

New principals also face many challenges in their first year. New principals will face a steep learning curve in their first years. Encouragingly, research conducted by Lochmiller et al. (2024) indicated that those principals who went through induction programs were better equipped to address the challenges in their role. This suggests that induction programs may serve as a buffer against the stress and difficulties often associated with transitioning into

principalship. Studying a principal induction program in Kansas, known as the Kansas Mentoring and Induction Program, Augustine-Shaw and Liang (2016) found that 100% of those who participated found it helpful during their first year on the job. Hudson (2009) examined a similar program in South Carolina. Participants found benefits in the program related to technical skills (89.33%), instructional leadership (77.63%), effective schools (87.66%) and mentoring (61%) (Hudson, 2009). This unanimous positive response underscores the potential value of well-designed induction efforts. The consistent positive findings across multiple studies and contexts provide strong evidence for the effectiveness of induction programs for new principals. These programs appear to enhance job satisfaction, improve leadership skills, increase confidence in establishing positive learning environments, and help new principals navigate the challenges of their roles.

The Impact of Induction on Teacher Satisfaction and Retention

Principals who participate in induction programs are better equipped to focus on supporting teachers, leading to higher teacher satisfaction and teacher retention. Teacher retention has emerged as a critical issue in education, particularly in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. As schools grapple with maintaining a stable and effective teaching workforce, the role of school leadership in fostering teacher retention has come under increased scrutiny. This section of this literature review examines the limited but significant evidence linking new principal induction programs to teacher retention, as well as the broader impact of effective school leadership on teacher retention rates.

Steinberg and Yang (2022) conducted a study that examined a Pennsylvania Induction Program (PIL) that contributed important findings related to the impact of induction on teacher satisfaction and retention. The study found that teacher turnover declined by 18% in the second

and third years following the principal's induction training (Steinberg & Yang, 2022). While this single study cannot be considered definitive, it provides a promising indication of the potential impact of well-designed principal induction programs on teacher retention. A study conducted in 2023 by the Education Resource Strategies reviewed data from "The School and Staffing Survey" of 2013. This survey found that 21% of teachers who voluntarily left their positions did so as a result of dissatisfaction with their administration. The participants further indicated that they were specifically dissatisfied with their principal's inability to support teachers (Education Resource Strategies, 2023).

Principal induction that emphasizes mentoring teachers are increasingly recognized as pivotal strategies for addressing teacher attrition, particularly among early career educators. Long et al. (2012) noted that induction and mentoring programs have become the dominant response to teacher turnover, though their assumed efficacy often lacks critical scrutiny of the research base. More recent empirical studies suggest that leadership support is central to teacher retention. Wyatt and O'Neill (2021) found that early career teachers identified principal involvement in induction as a force multiplier in their decision to remain in the profession. Similarly, Dockery (2023) emphasized that principals serving as mentors, who offer trust, communication, and practical guidance, play a critical role in helping new teachers acclimate to school culture. Leadership stability is another essential component. DeMatthews et al. (2022) demonstrated that principal turnover correlates with increased attrition, particularly in urban contexts, where instability undermines school climate and retention efforts. Gui (2024) further established that principal behaviors, leadership capacity, and school culture development are strongly associated with teacher satisfaction. Collectively, these findings highlight the

importance of robust principal induction and mentoring models not only for developing effective school leaders but also for cultivating the conditions necessary to retain teachers.

Instructional Leadership in Teacher Retention

While direct evidence is limited, a substantial body of literature emphasizes the crucial role of school leadership in teacher retention. There is an adage often attributed to Marcus Buckingham that suggests people do not quit jobs, they quit bosses (Buckingham & Coffman, 1999). With teachers, principals are their direct bosses, and there is evidence to suggest Buckingham's observation holds true in the education profession. Becker and Grob (2021) explored the link between the school principal and teacher retention, finding that a growing consensus has emerged that the way in which principals influence a school's climate influences teacher satisfaction. More satisfied teachers are more likely to stay at their job (Becker & Grob, 2021). Furthermore, Grissom and Bartanen (2019) suggested that various factors may connect more effective leadership to lower turnover with research highlighting the positive influence of effective leaders on school climate. This, in turn, enhances teacher satisfaction and commitment, making it less likely for them to leave (Grissom & Bartanen, 2019).

Effective principals create a shared vision and shared responsibility with all staff members. Gui (2024) emphasized that principals who build these shared visions significantly affect teacher satisfaction and retention. Mowafaq et al. (2020) concluded that instructional leadership is positively associated with a shared vision, which, in turn, is strongly linked to a lower likelihood of teachers intending to leave. Principals who develop a shared vision and responsibility can communicate clear expectations, are aware of the vision for the school, and are able to communicate the vision and ensure all staff are committed to the learning of every student. Furthermore, Boyce and Bowers (2018) found that principal behaviors linked to shared

instructional leadership, such as involving teachers in decision-making, fostering a sense of community, and providing instructional guidance and support, can impact teacher retention. This suggests that principal induction programs need to focus on supporting new principals develop a shared vision and ensure all faculty are committed to the vision.

Positive School Culture and Teacher Retention

Positive school culture and climate are very important in teacher retention. The literature ties teacher retention to the administrator's ability to build a positive school culture and climate. Boyce and Bowers (2018) found that the research agrees that the principal leadership and influence have a significant impact on school climate, teacher satisfaction, commitment, and retention. Lochmiller et al. (2024) further investigated the school climate and culture and concluded that the principal's actions are the most pressing factor related to working conditions. This includes creating, maintaining, and changing working conditions (Lochmiller et al., 2024). A study conducted by Grissom et al. (2021) found that when strong professional climates are present, instructional efficacy improves faster. Additionally, when the climate features an academic focus, student test scores are higher (Grissom et al., 2021). In 2007, Brown and Wynn conducted semi-structured interviews of school principals and concluded that principals viewed themselves as actively contributing to the improvement of school culture and teacher retention by fostering collaboration, creating supportive conditions, and offering opportunities for shared leadership, along with establishing common norms and values.

Flores and Schuls (2024) found direct links between positive school culture and teacher retention. The article referred to a mixed-methods study, conducted by Zavelevsky et al. (2022) that examined 1,570 teachers in Israel. According to the study, the aim was to identify school characteristics that are effectively training and retaining novice teachers. The study affirmed the

previously mentioned studies finding that schools with positive cultures had better teacher retention. The principal is key in building a school climate where teachers can feel empowered, supported, and valued. This underscores the pivotal role of school leaders in shaping the environment that influences teacher retention.

Teacher Development, Building Trust, and Teacher Retention

The literature also emphasizes the role of principals in attracting, retaining, and developing teachers, particularly new teachers. Schools with high teacher retention rates often have principals who prioritize practices that support and retain the most effective teachers. One of those practices is building and maintaining trust with teachers and teacher recognition. Lochmiller et al. (2024) found that principals who focus on strengthening professional relationships among teachers and fostering a collaborative, engaging school culture play a crucial role in teacher retention. Creating an environment where teachers feel comfortable seeking assistance from administrators is vital in helping them feel supported, which, in turn, encourages them to remain at the school despite the challenges they face. Similarly, Shell et al. (2023) found that principal support and encouragement significantly impact teacher retention. Principals who offer consistent support and show appreciation for their teachers often cultivate loyalty, leading to higher retention rates. Furthermore, the study by Shell et al. (2023) revealed that when teachers receive professional and career related support from their principals, they are more likely to stay at the school and continue in the profession.

A study conducted by the National Association of Secondary School Principals (2023) highlighted the significant impact of high-quality principal preparation on teacher retention. The study found that principals who are better prepared are more supportive. Well-prepared principals are better able to create supportive and collaborative environments, which are essential

for retaining teachers (National, n.d.). Additionally, effective principals prioritize the importance of professional development, as principal preparation programs emphasize continuous growth opportunities for teachers, making them feel valued and supported. Furthermore, principals must receive training in building trust. Those who engage in trust-building practices contribute to a positive school culture, which leads to higher teacher satisfaction and retention (National, n.d.). Principals who engage in preparation programs learn how to make data-driven decisions. This leads to principals becoming more experienced in utilizing data to make informed decisions. As a result, the principals can better address teachers' needs and improve instructional practices. This can then lead to creating a more stable teaching workforce, by creating a more positive and supportive school environment, leading to less teacher turnover.

The Impact of Induction on Student Achievement

Principals who participate in induction programs are better equipped to focus on instructional leadership, leading to an increase in student achievement (Corcoran, 2017; Nunnery et al., 2011b). The relationship between school leadership and student outcomes has long been a subject of interest in educational research. While much attention has been given to teacher effectiveness, the role of principals, particularly new principals, in influencing student achievement is an area that warrants further exploration. The focus for this part of the literature review is on the search for literature directly linking new principal induction programs to student achievement. Most of the studies found focused on teacher induction programs rather than those for principals. However, two notable studies from Pennsylvania provide some insights into this relationship, along with additional research suggesting indirect effects.

A 2021 study by Grissom et al. (2021) revealed the significant impact of effective principals on student achievement. The study found that principals ranking in the top 25% of

performance measures lead to a three-month gain in student reading and math scores.

Importantly, the researchers determined that this impact is indirect, primarily achieved through the principal's role in hiring and developing high-quality teachers. These findings underpin the imperative for school districts to acknowledge the paramount significance of principals and put in place mechanisms for attracting and retaining high performers. Additionally, the study highlights the continual necessity for principals to advocate for and facilitate educational equity in their schools.

The state of Pennsylvania implemented a comprehensive induction program titled "Pennsylvania's Inspired Leadership Induction Program" or PIL, for newly hired principals. This program required principals to complete training aligned with state leadership standards within five years of employment. This study found a positive correlation between program completion and student achievement, specifically in mathematics. Schools led by principals who had completed the program demonstrated improvements in both teacher effectiveness and student mathematics achievement. Steinberg and Yang (2022) showed that induction improved teacher efficacy in math on average of 0.012-0.019 student-level standard deviations. While this study did find a positive correlation in mathematics, the researchers believe that following the completion of PIL induction, improvements in teacher effectiveness may not be measurable until years after the completion of the principal professional development program (Steinberg & Yang, 2022).

There is additionally more positive correlation between principals who engage in a new principal induction program and student achievement. Another study from Wisconsin examined the impact of the Executive Development Program (EDP) induction program. This induction program utilizes the National Institute of School Leadership standards. This research identified a

modest but positive impact on student achievement in English Language Arts (ELA) by the third year of implementation. Students in schools with principals who completed the EDP program progressed from the 50th to the 51st percentile in ELA, representing a 1.7 percentile point increase (Corcoran, 2017). While this improvement may seem small, it is statistically significant and suggests a positive trend. Another study in Massachusetts that utilizes the NISL EDP induction program found that student achievement was also positively impacted by principals who participated in induction programs (Nunnery et al., 2011a). This study also pointed out that, in Pennsylvania, schools with EDP trained principals had gains in annual student proficiency rates of 0.48 percentage points in mathematics and 0.54 percentage points in English Language Arts compared to schools without EDP trained principals (Nunnery et al., 2011a).

A research article by Osborne-Lampkin et al. (2015) found that principal preparation emphasizes the role of principals as instructional leaders. The study identified principal preparation “as a positive predictor of student achievement growth ($r=.10$). Additionally, principals who received training in organizational and instructional leadership had higher achievement growth compared to those who did not get training (Osborne-Lampkin et al., 2015). While direct evidence is limited, some studies propose indirect positive effects of principal induction programs on student achievement. A research study conducted by the University of Chicago Consortium on School Research (2018) explored various ways that principals can impact student achievement, with an emphasis on the importance of fostering a strong, learning climate. The main key finding emphasized that principals must be able to create a strong learning climate. The study highlighted that the highest degrees of influence on student achievement come when principals foster a safe, supportive environment that has consistent and clear expectations for the students (University of Chicago, 2018). It continued by highlighting the

significance of professional development. Principals who emphasized ongoing professional growth for teachers and align school programs with educational objectives help improve student outcomes. Additionally, effective principals use data to guide their decisions, consistently reviewing student performance to adjust instructional strategies (University of Chicago, 2018).

Similarly, though it did not specifically measure the direct impact on student achievement, the work of Boyland et al. (2022) concluded that principals who completed the preparation program were perceived as well-prepared and effective in their roles, which boosts both teacher and student confidence. This in turn is associated with improved student outcomes. Sanchez and Watson (2021) also found that there is a connection between principals' instructional practices and student achievement in thirteen Title 1 elementary schools in central California. The study found that the best principals can clearly communicate goals to students and to staff. The final key finding of the Sanchez and Watson (2021) study was that the most effective principals employ student performance data to inform instructional interventions and strategies. This is effectively using evidence-based practice.

In total, these articles suggest that well-prepared principals, as a result of effective induction programs, are better equipped to a) Implement effective hiring practices b) Provide better coaching to teachers. The theory posits that improvements in human resource management and instructional leadership, fostered by induction programs, contribute to increased student achievement. However, this causal chain is complex and challenging to measure directly.

The Impact of Culturally Responsive Leadership in New Principal Induction Programs

Culturally responsive leadership is crucial in new principal induction programs to ensure that new leaders are equipped to address the diverse needs of their student populations (Gay, 2022; Gooden et al., 2023). Unfortunately, only two states offered a comprehensive professional

development program for new school leaders (Fitz & Levin, 2023). Examining successful programs, like those used in Pennsylvania, can help guide other states and educational professionals to adopt evidence-based induction measures in their own schools. Pennsylvania stands out with its well-defined, comprehensive program for all new school leaders. The Pennsylvania Principals Association Principal Induction Program created a comprehensive professional development initiative specifically designed for new school leaders. This program is part of the Pennsylvania Inspired Leadership (PIL) Program funded by the Pennsylvania Department of Education (Pennsylvania Principals Association, 2024). The PIL Program is a comprehensive, statewide initiative designed to develop the capacity of school and system leaders to improve student achievement. The program includes induction programming that focuses on culturally responsive leadership and equity. This program has key focus areas to ensure new principals receive professional learning on culturally responsive leadership. One key area focuses on creating culturally responsive school environments. According to the Pennsylvania Principals Association website (2024), the program has overarching goals that focus on creating inclusive and equitable school cultures. In these environments, all students feel valued regardless of their respective backgrounds.

In the Pennsylvania Principals Association (2024) model, there are three main components of their program. The first is culturally responsive leadership. This emphasizes the importance of understanding and addressing the diverse cultural backgrounds of students. Leaders are trained to create inclusive school environments that support all students. The second is equity. The program focuses on promoting equity in education by ensuring that all students have access to high-quality learning opportunities including addressing disparities and fostering an inclusive school environment. The final portion is professional development. The

PIL program offers a range of professional development courses that cover various aspects of leadership, including culturally responsive practices and equity-focused strategies (Pennsylvania Principals Association, 2024).

Like Pennsylvania, Massachusetts is a leader in principal preparation programs and bases its protocols on available evidence. The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's (n.d.) Principal Induction and Mentoring Program is also designed to support new Principals in developing culturally responsive leadership skills and anti-racist competencies. The program includes a comprehensive handbook that provides guidance on fostering inclusive and equitable school environments. According to the handbook, the program focuses on the following key components: culturally responsive leadership, anti-racist competencies, mentoring and support, and professional development. Under the spectrum of culturally responsive leadership, the program emphasizes the importance of understanding and addressing the diverse cultural backgrounds of students, which includes training on cultural competence and strategies for creating inclusive cultures. Within the sphere of anti-racist competencies, new principals are equipped with tools and knowledge to identify and combat systemic racism within their schools. This includes developing policies and practices that promote equity and justice (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, n.d.).

Under their mentoring and support program, the state pairs new principals with experienced mentors who provide guidance and support focused on practical applications of culturally responsive and anti-racist leadership (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, n.d.). Similarly, for professional development, there is ongoing professional development opportunities for principals to continuously improve their leadership skills and stay updated on best practices in equity and inclusion. Including culturally responsive

leadership in principal induction programs is crucial for fostering inclusive and equitable school environments (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, n.d.).

The three programs highlighted above, the Pennsylvania Principals Association Principal Induction Program, the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education Principal Induction and Mentoring Program, and the Pennsylvania Inspired Leadership (PIL) Program demonstrate the importance of this approach. By promoting equity, culturally responsive leadership ensures that all students, regardless of their background, have equitable access to educational opportunities (Gay, 2022; Gooden et al., 2023). By understanding and addressing the diverse cultural backgrounds of students, principals can create more inclusive and supportive school environments (Dey, 2022; Gay, 2022). Training in culturally responsive practices equips new principals with the skills needed to lead effectively in diverse settings, promoting continuous improvement and innovation. Within this spectrum, Gooden et al. (2023) pointed out that principals are not in a position and do not have the power to fix all of society's education inequities, however, they can address school related factors that perpetuate these inequities. By incorporating culturally responsive school leadership, equity centered leadership is a focus. This ensures that there is strategic self-reflection, a focus on fairness, and an understanding of community and the wisdom held within it (Gooden et al., 2023). By incorporating culturally responsive leadership into induction programs, school districts can develop principals who can lead schools that are inclusive, equitable, and supportive of all students.

Conceptual Framework

This study is anchored in two primary theoretical frameworks that provide complementary perspectives on principal development and organizational change.

Transformational leadership theory (Bass, 1985; Burns, 1978) serves as the foundational framework for understanding how newly appointed principals inspire, motivate, and develop stakeholders to exceed expectations and embrace collective goals. The theory of change in education (Meyer-Looze et al., 2023) provides a systematic lens for examining how principals navigate the sequential processes of organizational transformation. While other leadership theories including distributive leadership, instructional leadership, and culturally responsive leadership are relevant to this study, they are examined as essential subcomponents of transformational leadership practice rather than competing frameworks.

Transformational Leadership

Identifying and addressing entrenched school structures, while guiding transformation in ways that reflect and respect the cultural values and expectations of the surrounding communities is central to making schools better. Leadership theories, such as transformational, distributive, and culturally responsive leadership, offer the tools for principals to engage with stakeholders, inspire collective action, and foster inclusive school cultures. This integration enables principals to align their leadership practices with strategic interventions, creating a more effective and sustainable model for educational change and equity. As previously highlighted in Chapter 1, transformational leadership was selected as the conceptual framework for this research study. This theory underscores how principals must create change to inspire and motivate stakeholders to exceed expectations, create a shared vision, and foster professional growth (Bass, 1985).

Organizations are constantly evolving, necessitating leadership that can manage and drive change. Transformational leadership is an effective model that emphasizes adaptability to the current environment, utilizing internal data, human and financial resources, and external factors (Saad Alessa, 2021). Transformational leaders in schools prioritize collaboration, innovation, and

a focus on continuous improvement. Organizational success and goal achievement, aligned with a clear mission and vision, are typically linked to leadership strategies focused on improving service quality, implementing contemporary organizational development trends, and adjusting to both internal and external changes (Saad Alessa, 2021). Mansor et al. (2021) found that transformational leadership in administration had a significant effect on both trust and commitment to a vision by teachers. However, trust in the principal does not necessarily mediate the effect of leadership on working commitment. The study highlights that other factors, such as group dynamics and external work conditions, might also influence teachers' working commitment (Mansor et al., 2021).

According to the work of Sparks (2021), effective leadership first tests the leader's own capacity before influencing others. Over the past year, instructional leaders have been compelled to redefine their roles amid evolving demands. Research has consistently shown that strong leadership positively impacts student achievement and prepares learners for success in college, careers, and life. As expectations increase, the role of instructional leaders continues to shift. In general, organizational science, leadership is widely recognized as a critical factor in an organization's success or failure (Goolamally & Ahmad, 2014; Sparks, 2021). Among various models, transformational leadership has emerged as one of the most impactful in education (Berkovich, 2016; Sparks, 2021). Originally developed for political and business contexts, it has since been embraced by educational leaders. This leadership style is widely adopted because it focuses less on positional authority and more on influence. While this style is central as the study's conceptual framework, looking at other leadership theories was necessary before ultimately determining this framework was the most applicable.

Theory of Change in Education

Since the onboarding process and the switch to a new principal is a profound time of change in an educational organization, it was also logical to consider the theory of change as the conceptual framework for the study. To begin, it is important to note that the theory of change and change theory are two distinctly different things in education. Reinholz and Andrews (2020) highlighted that a theory of change is project specific and related to evaluation while change theories represent theoretically and empirically grounded knowledge about how change manifests and evolves thereby going beyond a singular project. The theory of change is complemented by leadership theories and frameworks that highlight the impact of principals on the everyday school dynamics, student outcomes and organizational culture. The theory of change is a systematic approach to mapping out the steps, inputs, and outcomes required to achieve long-term goals (Meyer-Looze et al. 2023).

Interpreted for educational settings, the Myer-Looze et al. (2023) emphasized the following:

- Contextual analysis: Identifying the specific needs and challenges within a school setting.
- Pathways of change: Articulating a clear sequence of activities and interventions that lead to the desired outcomes,
- Assumptions and resources: recognizing the conditions, resources, and stakeholders necessary for change in the educational system.

According to a research study conducted by the Educational Researcher (2023), in culturally diverse communities, the theory of change is particularly relevant as it allows principals to:

- **Identify Contextual Needs:** Understand the unique challenges and opportunities posed by cultural diversity in their schools.
- **Engage Stakeholders:** Foster collaboration with teachers, families, and community members to co-create shared goals for equality and inclusion.
- **Link Actions to Outcomes:** Develop clear pathways that connect leadership practices such as inclusive policies, professional development, and resource allocation to improved educational experiences for all students.

Additionally, Smith (2024) found that in the context of school leadership, principals use the theory of change to diagnose issues affecting student performance and culture, develop strategic plans to address these issues, engaging stakeholders such as teachers, students, parents, and the wider community align on shared objectives, and to evaluate progress through measurable indicators of success.

Although the theory of change offers a structured and context-specific approach to identifying goals, planning interventions, and measuring outcomes, it is primarily used as an evaluative tool rather than a lens for understanding leadership experiences. As such, it was limited in its potential to be the primary conceptual framework for the study. While it provides a useful framework for mapping processes and stakeholder involvement, it lacks the emphasis on relational influence, motivation, and vision that are central to transformational leadership and leadership in general. Because this study explored how newly appointed principals describe their onboarding and support experiences during a critical period of organizational transition, transformational leadership offered a more dynamic and relevant framework for examining how school leaders inspire, engage, and empower others during change. The figure below (Figure 2.1)

depicts the conceptual framework selected and its relationship to the research questions and other competing theories that were considered.

Other Leadership Theories

Outside of transformational leadership, other leadership paradigms considered for the framework included distributive leadership, instructional leadership, and culturally responsive leadership.

Distributive Leadership

This theory posits that effective change requires engaging multiple stakeholders in decision-making and implementation processes (Spillane et al., 2001). Principals who adopt a distributive leadership approach can delegate authority and empower teachers and staff to take ownership of change initiatives. This theory emphasizes the shared nature of leadership. In culturally diverse communities, distributive leadership ensures that change efforts are inclusive, leveraging the strengths of the entire school community to achieve equitable outcomes.

According to Spillane and Lee (2014), distributive leadership focuses on:

- a. Collaborative decision-making: leadership responsibilities are shared among principals, teachers, and other stakeholders to capitalize on diverse perspectives and expertise.
- b. Capacity building: Empowering teachers and staff to take ownership of change initiatives fosters a sense of shared responsibility and sustainability.
- c. Cultural competence development: Distributive leadership encourages professional learning communities that prioritize cultural awareness and responsive teaching practices.

Instructional Leadership

Instructional leadership focuses on the principal's role in driving the teaching and learning outcomes (Hallinger & Heck, 2010). This framework is aligned with the theory of change by emphasizing the connection between leadership actions, such as professional development, resource allocation, and curriculum alignment that leads to improved student outcomes. Instructional leadership also stresses the importance of creating a supportive school culture that fosters collaboration among teachers. By prioritizing continuous improvement and instructional quality, this framework aims to enhance both teacher effectiveness and student achievement. Kilag and Sasan (2023) found three key themes related to instructional leadership: the importance of instructional leadership practices, the quality of teacher-administrator relationships, and the need for continuous professional development. The findings emphasize the role of school leaders in modeling effective teaching, fostering trust and communication, and providing ongoing support through various professional development opportunities to enhance teacher growth and improve student outcomes.

Culturally Responsive Leadership

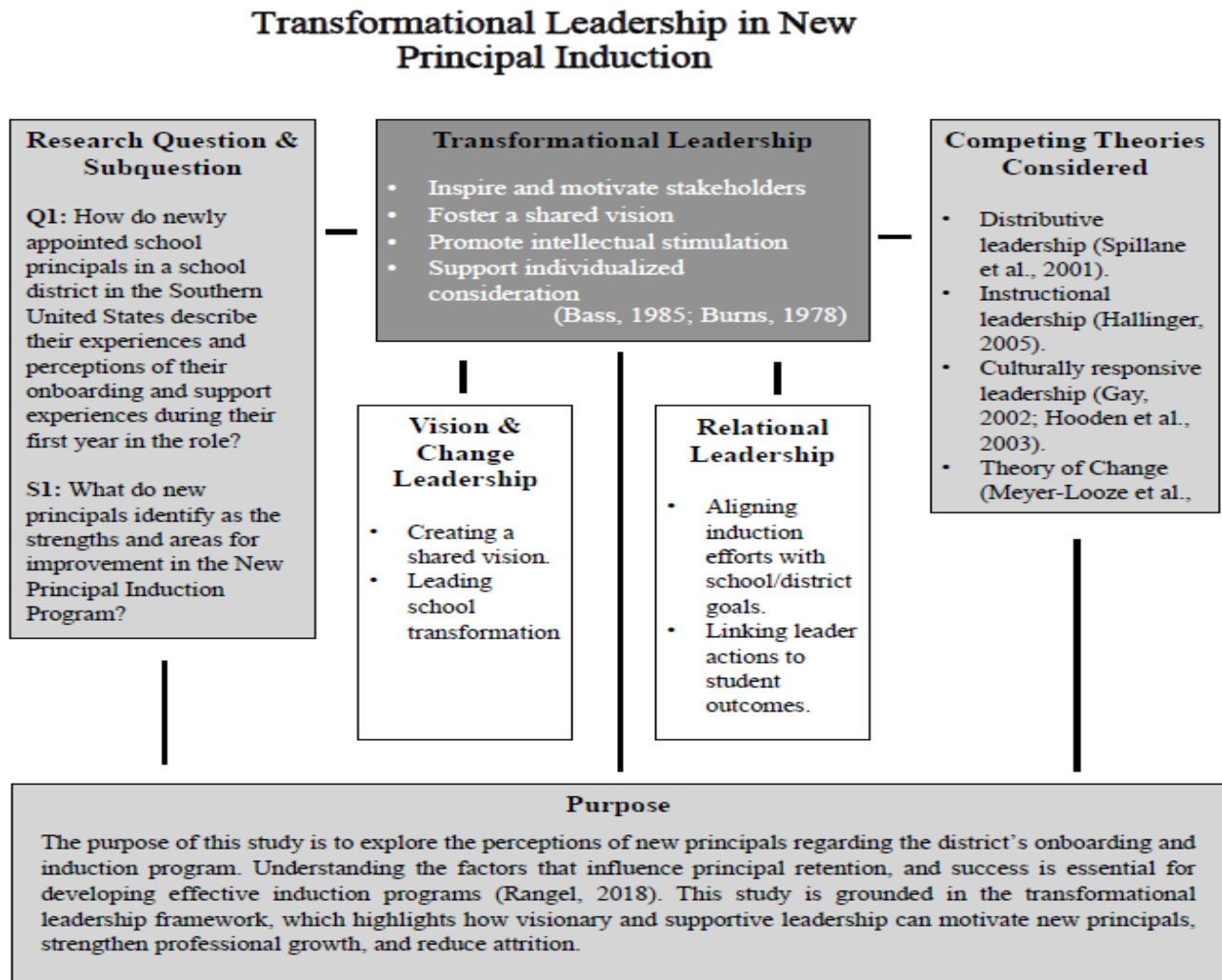
Culturally Responsive Leadership provides a critical lens for exploring how principals address the needs of diverse student populations. This work comes from Gay (2022) and Gooden et al. (2023). This framework situates principals as agents of social justice, emphasizing their role in fostering an inclusive school culture where all students feel valued and supported. Culturally responsive leadership emphasizes the following:

- a. Cultural competence: Principals must recognize and value the cultural identities of students, teachers, and families, ensuring that school policies and practices are inclusive and affirming.
- b. Equity-focused decision-making: Principals must confront systemic inequities, challenge biases, and advocate for resources and opportunities supporting historically marginalized groups.
- c. Community engagement: Principals must build meaningful partnerships and relationships with families and community organizations, drawing on local cultural knowledge to inform school improvement efforts.

While distributive, instructional, and culturally responsive leadership offer valuable insights into school improvement, they focus primarily on specific domains such as shared governance, instructional outcomes, or equity practices. Transformational leadership, by contrast, provides a more comprehensive framework that captures the motivational, relational, and visionary aspects of how principals lead organizational change. Given that the study focused on how newly appointed principals experience onboarding and support during a time of transitions, transformational leadership best aligned with the inquiry into how leaders inspire, engage, and empower others in dynamic and evolving school contexts.

Figure 2.1

Conceptual Framework: Transformational Leadership in New Principal Induction



Chapter Summary

This chapter presented a comprehensive review of the literature surrounding new principal induction programs and their impact on various aspects of school leadership and performance. The review explored four key areas: the impact of induction programs on new principal satisfaction and efficacy, the relationship between principal leadership and teacher satisfaction and retention, the influence of principal effectiveness on student achievement, and the impact of culturally responsive leadership in new principal induction programs. The literature

revealed a significant shift in the role of school administrators from primarily managerial functions to instructional leadership (Meyers & Hambrick Hitt, 2017; Mowafaq et al., 2020). This transformation, driven by high-stakes accountability measures and evolving educational policies, necessitates a corresponding change in how new principals are prepared and supported. The research indicated that effective induction programs should include mentoring, professional development focused on curriculum and instruction, opportunities for observation and analysis of effective practices, and training in data-driven decision-making (Meyers & Hambrick Hitt, 2017; Osborne-Lampkin et al., 2015; Thessin & Clayton, 2013).

Studies consistently show that new principals who participate in induction programs report higher levels of job satisfaction and feel better equipped to handle the challenges of their roles (Boyland et al., 2022; Martyn, 2023; Medford & Brown, 2022). The review also highlighted the crucial role of principal leadership in teacher retention. Multiple studies suggest that principals who create a shared vision, foster a positive school climate, and provide supportive leadership are more likely to retain teachers (Derrington & Campbell, 2015; Gooden et al., 2023; Mowafaq et al., 2020). Induction programs that focus on developing these skills in new principals have shown promising results in reducing teacher turnover (DeMatthews et al., 2022; Education Research Strategies, 2023). Student achievement also increases when principals participate in induction programs (Nunnery et al., 2011a; Nunnery et al., 2011b; Osborne-Lampkin et al., 2015). While direct evidence linking principal induction programs to student outcomes is limited, studies from Pennsylvania and Wisconsin demonstrate modest but significant improvements in student achievement, particularly in mathematics and English Language Arts, in schools led by principals who completed comprehensive induction programs. The literature also emphasized the importance of culturally responsive leadership in the impact

on student achievement (Dey, 2022; Gay, 2022; Gooden et al., 2023; Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, n.d.). In summary, this literature review underscored the importance of well-designed induction programs in preparing new principals for the complex demands of school leadership. The following chapter outlines the methodology used in this interpretative qualitative study, which focuses on a new principal induction program in a large, urban school district in the South.

Chapter 3: Research Methods and Procedures

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of new principals regarding the district's onboarding and induction program. Understanding the experiences of new principals in relation to the principal induction practices helped to explain the attrition rate taking place in the LUDD. The district analyzed in this study conducted research on principals as part of their 2024 strategic plan. They discovered that 1 out of every 7 principals left each year, with principals staying in their roles for an average of only four years (Wang et al., 2023). Although the strategic plan aimed to address principal turnover, it was not adopted due to a change in upper leadership, with a new interim appointed before the plan could be approved. As a result, the 2023-2024 school year was the last year that new principals participated in an induction program in this school district. New principals in the 2024-2025 school year only participated in a one-day induction program (LEA, n.d.). Through interviewing new principals that participated in the last induction program, further insight was achieved regarding the strengths and weaknesses of the program and the perspectives of the principals who participated in the program to determine whether the program should continue for new principals in the 2025-2026 school year. In addition to the induction program, the support that they received was analyzed as well. To gain insight into the perceptions of the new principals, 8 new principals who participated in the 2023-2024 new principal induction program in this large urban school district were interviewed.

As highlighted in Chapter 2, a growing body of research demonstrated that structured induction was essential for developing and retaining effective school leaders, particularly in large, high-need districts (Boyland et al., 2022; Fitz & Levin, 2023; Jochim, 2016; Osborne-Lampkin et al., 2015). Fitz and Levin (2023) explained that most states still lacked

comprehensive principal induction systems, creating uneven preparation and support for new administrators. Jochim (2016) further explained that local education agencies needed strong leadership pipelines because turnover undermined school improvement and destabilized reform efforts. This need was more urgent in districts serving culturally and linguistically diverse student populations, where principals faced complex instructional, operational, and equity demands; demographic and accountability data from the LUDD illustrated these challenges clearly (EdTrust, 2024; Wang et al., 2023). Therefore, a study examining the experiences of first-year principals in a high-need urban context provided insight into how induction practices shaped leaders' early development and their capacity to support school improvement.

Based on this, the completed study could equip upper administrators with the information needed to decide whether to invest in a new principal induction program. If an investment is warranted, the study could also help determine the content necessary to support new principals as they transition into their roles and serve culturally diverse communities. Results from the study may reveal more effective ways of supporting new principals as they navigate through their new roles. After restating the research questions, this chapter will describe the research methods and design, the population, the sample, the materials and instruments, data collection, processing, and analysis. Finally, this chapter will present the assumptions, limitations, delimitations, and ethical assurances.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of new principals regarding the district's onboarding and induction program. Understanding the experiences of new principals in relation to the principal induction practices helped to explain the attrition rate taking place in the LUDD.

Guiding this study were the following research question:

Q1: *How do newly appointed school principals in a school district in the Southern United States describe their experiences and perceptions of their onboarding and support experiences during their first year in the role?*

Additionally, the following sub-question also contributed to the study:

S1: *What do new principals identify as the strengths and areas for improvement in the New Principal Induction Program?*

Research Method and Design

Efron and Ravid (2019) highlighted that the primary distinction between quantitative and qualitative research lies in their differing views on knowledge. In qualitative research, knowledge is seen as socially constructed through the subjective meaning individuals attach to their experiences. Pilcher and Cortazzi (2023) argued that qualitative research is essential for understanding complex issues, providing contextual insights, and capturing the perspectives of the participants. Utilizing qualitative methods in this study allowed for an in-depth rich exploration of the experiences and perceptions of new principals, which were not easily quantifiable. These methods offered a rich, contextual understanding of how new principals navigate change and support culturally diverse communities, capturing the nuances of their experiences. These experiences are often multifaceted, involving emotions and personal insights that are better explored through qualitative methods. The flexibility of qualitative research enabled it to adapt to the evolving nature of the study, uncovering unexpected insights. By prioritizing the voices and perspectives of participants, qualitative research provided a detailed account of their experiences and viewpoints. The participants were able to share their stories in

their own words. This approach offered a holistic view of the phenomena being studied, considering various factors and their interrelationships (Meyer-Looze et al., 2023). The development of theories and frameworks from the analyzed data was done in a manner as to inform practice and policy in the future.

Quantitative research was not appropriate for this study as quantitative methods often focus on numerical data and statistical analysis. According to Efron and Ravid (2019), quantitative researchers view knowledge as something that can be obtained through impartial investigation. This knowledge is seen as cumulative, objective, and universally applicable, relying on observable evidence that can be measured, tested and is free from personal bias (Efron & Ravid, 2019). Williams (2021) explained that the aim of quantitative research was to examine the relationship between an independent variable and one or more dependent variables within a population. Quantitative data was often used when the goal of a study was to assess a problem or answer questions related to the “what” or “how many” aspects of a research question (Williams, 2021). However, the use of quantitative research in this study was deemed inappropriate.

Dawadi et al. (2021) described mixed-methods research as a methodology that combined both quantitative and qualitative approaches to address research questions in a systematic way. Efron and Ravid (2019) asserted that researchers who adopted a mixed-methods approach recognized that a study could have multiple objectives, with the primary goal being to answer the research question by integrating both quantitative and qualitative research methods. Utilizing mixed methods in a study designed to explore perspectives might dilute the focus by introducing quantitative elements, which could fail to fully capture the complexities of new principals’ experiences. If a mixed methods approach were employed, the quantitative component might not add significant value and could complicate the research process (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Galdas,

2017). Additionally, this approach might divert attention from participants' personal narratives. Therefore, a mixed methods approach was deemed not suitable for this study.

Interpretative qualitative research focuses on understanding individuals' lived experiences, meanings, and perspectives within specific social and cultural contexts (Bhattacharya, 2017; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Grounded in interpretivism, this approach assumes that reality is socially constructed and seeks to understand how individuals make sense of their social worlds rather than to generate causal explanations (Schutz, 1967; Schwandt, 2014). Knowledge is therefore viewed as contextual, subjective, and co-constructed through interaction between the researcher and participants. Interpretative qualitative inquiry involves the in-depth analysis of rich qualitative data, such as interviews and focus groups, and emphasizes meaning-making, reflexivity, and the researcher's interpretive role in knowledge construction (Charmaz, 2014; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Bhattacharya (2017) describes interpretative research as both a practice and a constellation of paradigms grounded in diverse theoretical traditions, including ethnomethodology and critical feminist theory. Similarly, Denzin and Lincoln (2018) conceptualize qualitative research as an interpretive, paradigmatic activity shaped by philosophical assumptions and theoretical frameworks that influence representation and meaning. Although all social research involves interpretation, interpretative qualitative research is distinguished by its explicit focus on understanding rather than explanation, privileging participants' meaning making over prediction or generalization (Bhattacharya, 2017; Schwandt, 2014). Interpretative paradigms and methodologies continue to evolve within qualitative research, reinforcing their central role in investigating complex human experiences. Based on these epistemological assumptions and methodological commitments, an interpretative qualitative research approach was selected for this study.

This study employed interpretative qualitative inquiry as its methodological foundation. Interpretative inquiry, as conceptualized by Bhattacharya (2017) and Denzin and Lincoln (2018), focuses on understanding how individuals construct meaning from their lived experiences within specific social contexts. This approach aligns with the constructivist-interpretivist paradigm, which posits that reality is socially constructed and can only be understood through the subjective experiences and interpretations of those who live it (Tisdell et al., 2025). The interpretative stance recognizes that newly appointed principals actively make sense of their onboarding experiences through a process of continuous interpretation and reinterpretation. As Schwandt (2000) explains, interpretative inquiry seeks to understand the meanings that participants ascribe to their experiences rather than imposing predetermined categories or explanations. This methodology was particularly appropriate for exploring how first-year principals in a southern urban district navigated the complex intersection of operational demands, transformational leadership development, and culturally responsive practices during their critical first year.

The interpretative paradigm shaped every aspect of this study's design, from data collection through analysis. Rather than seeking to establish generalizable truths or causal relationships, this inquiry aimed to illuminate the nuanced, context-specific ways that principals interpreted their induction experiences and constructed their leadership identities (Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2014). The researcher's role was to carefully document and analyze these meaning-making processes while remaining reflexive about how personal experiences as a former principal and current supervisor might influence interpretation.

Participants

An interpretative qualitative study was employed to address the research questions. The study focused on new principals as the participants. As new principals, the participants all met the established legal criteria for being an administrator in the Southern United States, which include having a Master's degree from an accredited university, a valid teaching certificate, at least two years of teaching experience, passing approved principal preparation or induction program, and passing the relevant examinations (LEA, n.d.). The sample included eight new principals who participated in the New Principal Induction Program in a large urban school district during the 2023-2024 school year.

A sample of eight participants is appropriate for an interpretative qualitative study because the purpose is depth rather than breadth, and rich narrative data are best generated from a small, intentionally selected group. Interpretative approaches depend on detailed accounts of lived experience, which require extended interviews and iterative analysis. Creswell and Poth (2018) noted that qualitative studies commonly use small samples, often ranging from five to twenty participants, because smaller groups allow the researcher to explore perspectives in sufficient depth to identify themes without fragmenting the data. Bhattacharya (2017) similarly explained that interpretive inquiry relies on collecting nuanced, context-specific accounts that become difficult to manage with larger participant pools. Patton (2015) emphasized that small information-rich samples are essential for capturing depth, meaning, and variation in qualitative analysis. Within these methodological traditions, eight participants provide enough variation to capture multiple viewpoints while still permitting careful, line-by-line coding and interpretation.

Sample

Participants for this study were selected based on their participation in the New Principal Induction Program in the large urban school district. The inclusion criteria for this study were: (a) new administrators who participated in the New Principal Induction Program, (b) administrators assigned to culturally diverse campuses, and (c) administrators who remained in the same urban school district for their second year of principalship. Participants were recruited via email and/or phone calls. A list of potential participants who met the qualifications was generated, and IRB approval sought. Participants signed an informed consent form. Once the new principals agreed to participate, the researcher invited them to an interview via Zoom. Data from the eight new principals was collected through semi-structured interviews (see Appendix A).

Data Collection

Data were collected through two primary sources: semi-structured interviews with eight first-year principals and district documents (agendas, presentations, District provided post-session surveys) related to the New Principal Induction Program. These methods were selected because interpretative qualitative studies required rich, contextually grounded accounts of participants' experiences, and semi-structured interviews allowed for both consistency and depth, a balance Creswell and Poth (2018) explained was essential for studies centered on meaning-making.

Semi-Structured Interviews

Interview questions were developed to align with the study's theoretical frameworks and were informed by prior qualitative research on leadership induction. A single interview with each participant was justified because well-structured, theory-aligned interviews could produce

sufficiently rich narratives for thematic analysis, as Bhattacharya (2017) and Kvale & Brinkmann (2009) explained. Participants were recruited by email, and all interviews and document reviews were completed within a three-week period, ensuring consistency in the timing and conditions of data collection.

Formal semi-structured interviews were deemed suitable for this study because the questions were prepared in advance. This method involved the researcher preparing questions in advance with possible probes identified (Bhattacharya, 2017; Mashuri et al., 2022). The interviews adhered to an interview protocol (see Appendix B) and a set of predetermined interview questions (see Appendix A) that aligned with the research questions. Using formal semi-structured interviews ensured consistency across all the interviews, allowing the researcher to compare responses for each question among participants. The ability to probe, when necessary, means that the interviews lasted between 30 to 60 minutes each. All interviews were conducted and recorded via Zoom, with participants providing authorization for recording as stated in the informed consent.

Document Analysis

The document analysis component examined materials that principals encountered during their 2023-2024 induction year (see appendix K). The document analysis included session agendas, presentation materials, and district-provided post-session surveys completed by participants. Following Bowen's (2009) framework for document analysis in qualitative research, documents were selected based on their relevance to answering the research questions, their authenticity as genuine district artifacts, and their credibility as official sources of information provided to new principals. The corpus included five categories: monthly induction agendas from October through May detailing session topics, presenters, and time allocations;

district protocol documents outlining principal placement and relationship-building processes (Appendix E); operational reference materials specifying budget guidelines for various funding streams; the district's SWOT analysis identifying organizational strengths and weaknesses; and participant feedback from district-provided post-session surveys collected after induction sessions in October, February, and May (see appendices). These materials represented both the formal structures principals encountered and their real-time perceptions of program effectiveness, providing a comprehensive view of the district's intended support systems.

All documents were authentic district artifacts stored in a shared Google Drive accessible to principal supervisors and district leadership. The researcher accessed these materials through legitimate professional permissions, ensuring ethical data collection procedures that aligned with institutional research protocols. No confidential personnel records, individual student data, or restricted documents were included in the analysis, maintaining appropriate boundaries for educational research.

This grouping of interview data, documents, and literatures provided contextual evidence to triangulate the findings, allowing systematic comparison between stated program intentions, actual implementation structures, and principals' lived experiences. The materials illuminated what content district leadership prioritized, how operational knowledge was transferred through formal channels, and which support systems existed within the induction framework. By examining these artifacts alongside participant narratives, the study could identify gaps between programmatic design and principals' developmental needs during their critical first year.

Data Processing

To examine the data, thematic analysis was employed to code and interpret the information. The initial phase of data analysis involved collecting interview material according

to the established protocol and identifying themes based on research questions. The data collected from the interviews sought to answer questions specifically developed for this study (see Appendix A). This data was aligned with the research question and any other relevant information provided by the participants. Brainstorming webs (mind maps) were considered for highlighting themes and codes for each research question; however, the final analysis utilized a structured coding framework (see Appendix D). According to Braun and Clarke (2006), exploratory tools such as visual mapping can support theme generation, rigorous thematic analysis ultimately requires a systematic and structured coding process.

The researcher recorded the interviews via Zoom and subsequently transcribed each interview. The Zoom transcription service, which automatically converts the recordings into text, was used. The researcher reviewed the transcription to ensure accuracy. Braun and Clarke (2006) describe this process as foundational to rigorous thematic analysis, emphasizing transcript verification, systematic coding, and iterative theme development. Following transcription, the researcher analyzed each individual interview and code to identify themes. Once all interviews were coded, major themes were developed.

The researcher collected all relevant documents provided to the new principals during the program. As noted above, the documents were stored in a Google Drive that all principal supervisors and upper leadership had access to, and as the researcher, I gained access by obtaining authorization to access the drive. These documents were analyzed by categorizing them according to the research questions. Additionally, the documents were coded, and themes identified. The coding and thematic techniques helped identify any patterns and themes that emerged from the data, thus resulting in deeper insights into the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). All identified themes

were considered within the context of the established conceptual framework, transformational leadership. The following section looks more closely at the analysis and coding process with attention to justification.

Data Analysis

The coding process followed a structured progression from open coding to axial coding and then thematic development, an approach consistent with qualitative analytic guidance provided by Braun and Clarke (2006). Codes were clustered into conceptual families during axial coding, and recurring patterns across interviews were synthesized into overarching themes. Relationships among codes were examined through constant comparison to determine which higher-order concepts best represented participants' shared experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Theory informed the organization and interpretation of the coded data, as transformational leadership (Bass, 1985; Burns, 1978) and the theory of change (Meyer-Looze et al., 2023) served as guiding analytical lenses. These frameworks shaped how codes were categorized and how emerging themes were aligned with leadership constructs relevant to new principal induction. Appendices D and F highlight the codebook table employed and the theoretical justifications.

Additionally, document analysis was conducted using the same coding framework applied to interviews. Induction agendas, presentations, and program materials stored in Google Drive were reviewed line-by-line, coded for alignment with participant narratives, and compared to interview data to corroborate or contrast reported experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Frequencies were recorded to document how often specific codes appeared across interviews, providing transparency into the prevalence of concepts contributing to each theme (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Assumptions

Assumptions are the underlying beliefs the researcher brought into the study about the nature of the phenomenon and the expected conditions of the research process (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In conducting this study, several assumptions were made. It was assumed that the new principal induction program effectively prepared new principals for their roles, particularly in managing change and supporting culturally diverse communities. Additionally, it was presumed that the participants would engage fully with the program and find it beneficial, based on prior observations and interactions. There was an inherent bias towards viewing the program as successful, which could influence the interpretation of data. It was also assumed that the content and structure of the program were well-received and understood by the new principals. Furthermore, it was expected that all new principals would have similar experiences and outcomes from the program, potentially overlooking individual differences. Lastly, it was assumed that the support and resources provided during the program were adequate and met the needs of the new principals. These assumptions were acknowledged and addressed through strategies such as triangulation, member checking, and maintaining a reflective journal to mitigate potential biases.

Limitations and Delimitations

Limitations

This study recognized several limitations and delimitations. The first were all those elements innate to qualitative research. Qualitative research, while offering rich, in-depth insights, is often limited by its subjective nature, as findings are heavily influenced by the researcher's interpretations and biases (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Additionally, the non-generalizable nature of qualitative data means that results may not be applicable to broader

populations, and the small sample sizes typically used can limit the scope of conclusions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Limitations specific to this study were the number of new principals reached. The New Principal Induction Program was provided both during summer and school-day sessions; because of scheduling conflicts, not all new principals were reached. Second, due to a recent major reorganization at the LUDD, there were many new district-level staff placed to support; these may not have the experience and historical knowledge to provide the support needed. Lastly, scheduling interviews with busy principals prove problematic due to the high rate of attrition. Another limitation is that the nature of the research was qualitative and did not directly link student achievement data to quantifiable “success.” As such, it was particularly important to clearly and in detail define what constituted a successful first year as a principal, and such a definition was developed through analysis of new principals' perceptions regarding the impact of the induction program on their perceived success. This definition was fully explored and articulated within the study.

Specific to this study was the limitation of a relatively small sample size. The sample consisted of eight new principals from a single large urban school district. This limited sample size may not have fully captured the diversity of experiences and perspectives of new principals across different contexts and different parts of the city. Creswell and Poth (2018) explained that small qualitative samples can limit the transferability of findings because they may not reflect the full variation of experiences across a broader population.

The use of Zoom for conducting and recording interviews also posed a limitation, such as technical issues or the lack of non-verbal cues that had the potential to affect the depth and quality of the data collected. This study also captured the experiences and perceptions of new principals at a single point in time. This approach did not account for changes in perceptions or

experiences over time, which could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the long-term impact of the induction program. Creswell and Poth (2018) noted that cross-sectional qualitative designs limit the ability to observe how participants' perceptions evolve over time, reducing the depth of insight into long-term program effects. The study's findings were influenced by the specific context of the school district and the unique challenges and opportunities it presented. As a result, the generalizability of the findings to other districts or contexts appeared to be limited. Despite these limitations, the study aimed to provide valuable insights into the strengths and weaknesses of the new principal induction program and inform future efforts to support new principals effectively.

Delimitations

Delimitations refer to the boundaries set by the researcher in the study's design (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This study had several delimitations that define its scope. First, this study was delimited to the perspectives of new principals who participated in the 2023-2024 induction program. This specific timeframe was chosen to capture the experiences of principals who were part of the last cohort to undergo the full induction program before it was reduced to a one-day event for the 2024-2025 school year. By focusing on this group, the study aimed to assess the comprehensive impact of the induction program as it was originally designed. The second delimitation was time. Finding time to interview the principals proved challenging, as campus administrators have very busy schedules. The researcher found the second semester to be the busiest time for campus administrators, as they were engaged in ensuring that all students were prepared for the end of year state accountability tests (state accountability assessments), which are given to students beginning in April. This research also focused exclusively on new principals within a single large urban school district, which limited the study to this specific

context.

The decision to concentrate on this district was made to provide a detailed and in-depth analysis of the induction program's impact within a particular setting. Consequently, this limits the applicability of the findings to other districts or regions with different characteristics. Additionally, the research was conducted using only qualitative methods, specifically with the use of semi-structured interviews, to gather in-depth insights into the participants' experiences and perceptions. While this approach allowed for a rich, detailed understanding of the phenomena under study (Creswell & Poth, 2018), it did not include quantitative measures that could provide broader statistical generalizations. Finally, the research did not explore the perspectives of other stakeholders, such as students, teachers, or other district administrators impacted in one way or another by the induction program. The focus remained solely on the new principals. Creswell and Poth (2018) explained that clearly defined delimitations help maintain coherence in qualitative studies by narrowing the inquiry to aspects most relevant to the research purpose. As a result, these delimitations were intentionally set to ensure that this study was focused and coherent, while providing insights into the strengths and weaknesses of the new principal induction program and its impact on new principals' ability to manage change and support culturally diverse communities.

Trustworthiness and Ethical Considerations/Assurances

IRB approval was obtained prior to data collection. Ethical considerations focused on ensuring trustworthiness. Trustworthiness references the degree to which the findings are credible, dependable, and grounded in the data, ensuring that the study's interpretations accurately reflected participants' experiences (Butin, 2010). Trustworthiness was addressed prior to each interview. Each participant was informed that the information was confidential and

would only be used for the research study. Participants were told that pseudonyms would be utilized. The use of pseudonyms was to encourage honesty among administrators. In addition, a pseudonym was utilized for the school district in which all participants work. Information from the documents analyzed was altered to ensure the name of the school district was not evident.

Written consent was obtained from all participants (see Appendix C). The informed consent form included a description of the study, the risks and benefits of participation, the participant roles and rights, and a researcher affidavit. Obtaining written informed consent aligned with ethical standards for practitioner research, which requires researchers to clearly communicate the study's purpose, procedures, risks, and participant rights (Butin, 2010). This consent form was shared prior to the interview to allow participants to make informed decisions about their involvement in the study. To build rapport, the researcher focused on fostering relationships and supporting these administrators in their professional and personal growth. Bhattacharya (2017) explained that rapport building was an essential component of qualitative research because strong researcher-participant relationships supported openness, trust, and richer sharing of personal experiences, aligning well with Kadam (2017). This approach helped participants trust the researcher and feel confident that the interviews would be conducted in a safe environment where their name and shared information will remain confidential.

Careful methods were undertaken to validate and ensure the accuracy of the data. The researcher remained objective throughout the interview transcription and thematic interpretation phases to include a thorough unbiased data analysis. To enhance the credibility of the results, multiple methods of data collection and document analysis were for validation. The researcher kept a journal to document findings and increase the dependability of the findings. Creswell and Poth (2018) explained that using multiple data sources and maintaining reflective documentation

strengthened credibility and dependability by allowing the researcher to verify interpretations through triangulation.

Member checking, a technique used to enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the data, allowed participants to review their responses (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This process helped validate the research findings, reduce researcher bias, and build trust between the researcher and the participants, ensuring that the participant's voices were accurately represented in the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). To safeguard the data collected and protect the individuals who participated, the research materials were shredded when they were no longer needed. Additionally, data was triangulated to ensure consistency and dependability in developing themes. A peer review was conducted with two other researcher's colleagues, who verified that multiple data sources were being analyzed and that the interpretations were accurate. Triangulation and peer review strengthened the credibility of the findings by ensuring that interpretations were verified across multiple data sources and examined by external reviewers for accuracy (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Credibility

Credibility in qualitative research referred to the extent to which the findings accurately reflected participants' experiences, a standard grounded in ethical rigor and trustworthy analytic practices (Butin, 2019). The credibility in this interpretative qualitative study was achieved with the help of a variety of converging strategies that provided genuine coverage of the lived experience of first-year principals with the New Principal Induction Program. The researcher performed data triangulation through a systematic analysis of semi-structured interviews and program documents such as presentations, agendas, and materials stored in a shared Google Drive, allowing for corroboration of the perspective held by participants with official program

structures. Member checking processes engaged the eight participants in reading their interview transcripts and draft results, which verified the representation of their voices and justified interpretations prior to concluding analysis. Internal coherence was observed by the consistency of themes among all participants, especially relational networks and walls in knowledge transfer. Well-informed and detailed accounts of contexts of participants such as campus demographics, leadership issues, and personal program experiences allowed readers to evaluate the validity and plausibility of evidence in closely related educational institutions. In sum, the credibility of this study followed Butin's (2010) recommendations and was reinforced through systematic strategies such as triangulation, member checking, and coherent theme development, all of which ensured that the findings faithfully represented participants' lived experiences.

Transferability

This interpretative qualitative study employed purposeful sampling and rich contextual description to enhance the potential transferability of findings to similar educational contexts. The research was conducted within a large urban school district in the Southern United States, specifically examining the experiences of eight first-year principals serving culturally diverse, high-poverty, and turnaround campuses during the 2023-2024 academic year. Detailed demographic information was provided regarding participant backgrounds, school settings, student populations (including percentages of Hispanic, African American, emergent bilingual, economically disadvantaged, and homeless students), campus performance ratings, and specific leadership challenges encountered. These thick descriptions enable readers to assess the similarity between their own contexts and the research setting, thereby determining the applicability of findings to their particular circumstances (Ahmed, 2024; Bhattacharya, 2017). The study's focus on principals navigating complex organizational transitions while developing

transformational leadership capacities in diverse educational environments may resonate with similar urban districts facing comparable demographic and systemic challenges.

The transferability of the findings of this study is also helped by extensive reporting of the conceptual framework, methodological approaches, and analytical processes used in the course of conducting the research. This research was framed by the two main theoretical models, namely, transformational leadership theory (Bass, 1985) and theory of change in education (Meyer-Looze et al., 2023) with instructional leadership, distributive leadership, and culturally responsive leadership as constituent parts of transformational leadership practice. The semi-structured interview outline, frameworks of thematic analysis, and codes are elaborately described (as recorded on appendices) to allow other researchers to observe procedure of the methodological procedures in other contexts. While the findings emerged from a specific district context during a particular academic year, the identified themes regarding relational networks, systemic knowledge transfer gaps, context-specific support needs, and organizational change management scaffolding may have broader relevance for principal preparation programs, district-level induction systems, and leadership development initiatives serving diverse, high-need school communities across the Southern United States, and beyond.

Dependability

Dependability references the consistency and stability of the research process over time, ensuring that the study's procedures were logical, traceable, and clearly documented (Butin, 2010). The dependability of this research was established through systematic documentation of all methodological decisions, analytical processes, and contextual factors that shaped the study's execution and findings. A comprehensive audit trail was maintained throughout the research process, including detailed records of participant recruitment procedures, interview scheduling

and conduct, Zoom recording management, transcription processes, and the evolution of coding structures.

The researcher utilized Microsoft Excel as the primary data management system, creating a structured coding framework that systematically organized participant responses according to the two primary theoretical frameworks, transformational leadership and theory of change, while recognizing instructional leadership, distributive leadership, and culturally responsive leadership as subcomponents of transformational practice. This organizational approach was supported by the foundational descriptions of transformational leadership offered by Bass (1985) and Burns (1978), the theory of change framework outlined by Meyer-Looze et al. (2023), and the leadership subcomponents described in the work of Gay (2022) and Gooden et al. (2023), all of which justified structuring the coding system around these interconnected theoretical lenses. All analytical decisions were documented in a reflexive journal that tracked the researcher's evolving interpretations, committee feedback integration, and peer review processes. Changes to the research setting were carefully noted, including the district's transition from comprehensive induction programming to abbreviated single-day orientation, which provided critical context for understanding participants' experiences as members of the final cohort to receive full program support.

The dependability of the results was also reinforced by committee audits at different points in the coding process, and peer review validation by two other researchers ensured that the interpretation accuracy and thematic consistency conformed to dual theory analysis of the study. Each interview was conducted through a standardized and pre-tested protocol, though flexible to explore more of the experiences of the participants, balancing consistency of data collection processes with the responsiveness to individual stories. The researcher kept comprehensive

records of the nature of the interactions during interviews, and technical issues, worker interaction patterns, and other contextual factors that could have affected the answers. All Zoom digital recordings were accurately transcribed through Zoom using the transcription service and all transcripts were verified as accurate before analysis.

Confirmability

Confirmability is defined as the extent to which the findings were shaped by the participants rather than by researcher bias, ensuring that interpretations were grounded in the data itself (Butin, 2010). Confirmability was rigorously maintained through comprehensive audit trails and systematic documentation that demonstrated how findings emerged from participant data rather than researcher bias or preconceptions per Butin's (2010) framework. The researcher maintained a reflexive journal throughout data collection and analysis phases, explicitly documenting analytical decisions, committee feedback integration, evolving interpretations, and moments where personal experiences as a former principal and current supervisor might influence perspective. Raw interview transcripts generated through Zoom's transcription service and subsequently verified for accuracy were retained alongside coded segments, enabling independent verification of interpretational pathways. Committee members conducted audits at multiple coding stages, examining the correspondence between raw data and emergent themes to ensure conclusions reflected participants' experiences rather than researcher expectations. The researcher's explicit acknowledgment of potential bias including previous leadership success without formal induction and current supervisory role combined with systematic strategies to bracket these influences, strengthened confirmability by demonstrating conscious efforts to privilege participant voices over personal perspectives throughout the analytical process.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of new principals regarding the district's onboarding and induction program, which included the support they received in their first year. This chapter highlighted the significant challenge of principal turnover in the United States, particularly in the southern region, where research showed high turnover rates, especially in high-poverty schools. This turnover has substantial financial implications and affects educational continuity and school improvement efforts. The study aimed to provide insights that could influence how new principals are supported in a major school district.

This chapter explained the choice of qualitative research methods, emphasizing the suitability to capture participant perspectives. The interpretative qualitative research approach was selected for its ability to focus on people's experiences, meanings, and perspectives in a specific context (Bhattacharya, 2017; Creswell & Poth, 2018). Additionally, this chapter described the research design, including the population, sample, materials, and instruments used for data collection, processing and analysis. It outlined the steps taken to ensure the trustworthiness of the data, such as triangulation, peer review, and member checking. Ethical considerations, including obtaining IRB approval and ensuring confidentiality, were also addressed. Finally, the chapter presented the assumptions, limitations, and delimitations of the study, acknowledging potential biases and the specific context of the research. The goal was to provide a comprehensive understanding of the new principal induction program, and its impact, offering valuable insights for future practice and policy. Chapter 4 will examine the findings of the research study.

Chapter 4 – Results

Overview

This research was situated within the context of a large urban school district (LUDD) in the southern United States, that has a culturally diverse, high-poverty student body served by newly appointed principals. The study aimed to enhance the knowledge base on the experiences and perceptions of first-year principals regarding onboarding and support systems in their initial year of leadership in education. Specifically, it focused on identifying strengths and areas for improvement to facilitate more effective participation in formal induction programs. To respond to the research questions, the study involved detailed semi-structured interviews with eight first-year principals in the LUDD who engaged in the 2023-2024 New Principal Induction Program. The participants were asked to share their lived experience, which aligns with Creswell and Poth's (2018) guidance that qualitative inquiry seeks to understand the meanings individuals assign to their experiences, particularly as they described transitioning to comprehensive school management, after working in departments, and mastering the new skills of transformational leadership at the same time.

The main themes that emerged were (a) Cultivating Relational Networks that Fuel Transformational Leadership, (b) Redesigning Systemic Knowledge Transfer for Effective Principal Preparation, (c) Providing Context-Specific Support for Cultural Leadership Development, and (d) Providing Structured Scaffolding for Organizational Change Management. The sub-themes were (aa) Embracing Vulnerability to Strengthen Leadership and (bb) Leveraging Operational Excellence as the Foundation for Instructional Leadership. This chapter provides extensive descriptions of the participants and varying school settings, describes the systematic and thematic analysis methods used to analyze the participants' narratives, and

summarizes participant findings using leadership theoretical frameworks. The chapter ends with a detailed synthesis of the essential findings regarding each of the emergent themes (see above) and presents a cursory discussion of future steps.

Thematic Analysis

This research utilized thematic analysis as the most central analytical approach in order to analyze the experiences and perceptions of first-year principals regarding their onboarding and assistance in the initial year of their leadership activities. Thematic analysis was chosen on the basis of its systematicity in identifying, analyzing, and describing patterns of significance in qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analytical process was underpinned by transformational leadership theory, which served as a conceptual lens to interpret the experiences of the participants on developing leadership capacity, relationships, and managing organizational change in culturally diverse school communities.

The analytical strategy was based on the six-phase framework of thematic analysis outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), which involved familiarizing oneself with data by rereading interview transcriptions, then coding initial meaningful segments of data based on emergent issues. Braun and Clarke (2006) describe these six phases as: (1) familiarizing oneself with the data, (2) generating initial codes, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) producing the report. Each phase built sequentially on the previous one, beginning with deep immersion in the raw interview transcripts and progressing through systematic coding, theme construction, and interpretative refinement. This structured approach ensured that the analysis remained grounded in participant voices while maintaining methodological rigor and transparency throughout the process. Microsoft Excel was used as the major data management and coding system that enabled a systematic organization of codes,

categories, and emergent themes. The coding process entailed inductive and deductive coding, whereby the codes generated in the narrative of the participants informed but were effective within the scope of the two primary theoretical frameworks: transformational leadership theory and theory of change in education. Transformational leadership provided the foundational lens for understanding principals' development of inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration, and idealized influence. Pattern identification was achieved through iterative data analysis of the coded data, and thematic development was formed based on how the participants described the support systems, relationship building, professional learning experiences, and the process of leadership development. This process aligns with Braun and Clarke's (2006) guidance that thematic analysis requires repeated engagement with the data, systematic coding, and the development of themes that reflect meaningful patterns across participant accounts. The refinement of themes and report generation were carried out as the final stages, where identified themes were valid portrayals of the voices of the participants answering the research questions of the study as to the onboarding experiences and to the effectiveness of the New Principal Induction Program.

Document analysis contributed uniquely to thematic development by providing structural context for participants' experiential narratives. While interview coding captured how principals interpreted and made meaning of their experiences, document coding illuminated the organizational design decisions, resource allocations, and programmatic choices that shaped those experiences. This dual-lens approach enabled themes that reflected both subjective perception and objective reality.

Document evidence functioned in three analytical capacities: corroboration, contradiction, and contextualization. Corroboration occurred when document content validated

participants' reported experiences from the semi-structured interviews. For example, when multiple participants described feeling unprepared for budget management, examination of induction agendas confirmed that budget training was provided only in month three of the program year, allocated limited time (90 minutes for a highly complex system), and included no follow-up support or reference resources. The documents corroborated participants' claims of insufficient preparation by revealing structural program limitations. Contradiction emerged when documents and interviews diverged, revealing gaps between program intentions and implementation realities. Induction agendas indicated that "Culturally Responsive Leadership" was not included as an explicit session topic despite participants particularly those serving schools with predominantly Hispanic and refugee populations identifying cultural competence as a critical need the program did not address. This contradiction highlighted a significant omission in program design that participants' perspectives brought into sharp focus.

Contextualization involved using documents to enrich understanding of the organizational environment. The district's SWOT analysis document, for instance, revealed that "departments working in silos" and "initiatives—quantity over quality" were identified concerns across the employee base, not unique to new principals (Appendix J). This contextual information deepened interpretation of principals' reported experiences of fragmented support and competing priorities by situating individual experiences within broader organizational challenges. Document coding followed the same framework as interview coding (Appendix D), enabling systematic comparison. This documentary evidence transformed anecdotal reports into documentable program gaps.

District-provided post-session survey data from participants (see Appendix G: Participant District Provided Survey Responses) provided real-time participant feedback captured during the

induction experience rather than retrospectively. These artifacts showed that principals' end-of-year interview reflections aligned with evaluations they provided immediately following program sessions. For example, October 2023 district-provided survey responses consistently rated budget and operational training as "extremely beneficial" while requesting "more time" and "chunked delivery" patterns that resurfaced in year-end interviews when participants described budget knowledge as their primary challenge (see Appendix G). This temporal triangulation strengthened confidence in findings. The integration of document evidence is presented throughout the results of this chapter using this structure: thematic description based primarily on interview data, illustrative participant quotations demonstrating the theme, document evidence showing program structure related to the theme, and analytical synthesis explaining how documents corroborate, contradict, or contextualize participant experiences. This approach makes transparent how multiple data sources contributed to each theme while maintaining appropriate emphasis on participants' interpreted experiences as the study's central focus.

Data Treatment

Data treatment in this interpretative qualitative research was conducted according to a systematic course of action aimed at providing the rigor, transparency, and ethical treatment of the participant experiences. This approach is consistent with Creswell and Poth's (2018) emphasis on applying systematic and ethical procedures in qualitative research to ensure credibility, transparency, and respect for participants' lived experiences. Transcripts of eight first-year principals were arranged with a well-structured coding system created in Microsoft Excel (see Appendix D), which coded responses based on theoretical overlap, such as transformational leadership, instructional leadership, and culturally responsive leadership theories. The coding structure was designed to systematically respond to the research questions

by organizing the participant responses based on predetermined categories characterizing onboarding strengths, areas that can be improved, and support experiences, and enabling emergent themes to appear organically out of the data. This two-sided strategy guaranteed that both deductive analyses would conform to the conceptual framework, and inductive discovery of unexpected insights would not be lost in the analytical process (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Quality assurance controls were applied in the process of data treatment to promote objectivity and assure the validity of findings. Committee audits took place at various points throughout the coding procedure, and two research associates did peer review confirmation and affirmed that interpretations were precise and theme development congruent. The researcher kept a reflexive journal during the transcription, coding, and analysis processes to record reflexive acts and analytical decisions, and to chart the development of understandings about themes (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Confidentiality measures were strictly enforced by assigning pseudonyms to all participants and the school district and systematically replacing identifying information in transcripts and coding documents. Member checking processes enabled participants to revise the interview transcripts, ensuring accuracy in reflecting their voices while also strengthening trust and validating the research findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018). All data storage and handling practices were conducted as per IRB-approved protocols, wherein digital files were securely stored and physical materials disposed of as per set timelines.

Participant Description

The eight participants involved in this study constituted a multicultural group of new principals serving the LUDD in the 2023-2024 academic year. Every principal was purposefully assigned to a high-need, turnaround campus with substantial socioeconomic difficulties and a high concentration of Hispanic and African American students. This section gives in detail the

profiles of the participants, including their educational settings, previous experience, and the special leadership issues that they faced during their movement to principalship. Assigning these leaders to the most challenging campuses in the LUDD demonstrates the district's desire to station new principals at campuses where transformational leadership is highly required.

The demographic make-up of the campuses that these principals work in shows a common theme in that they all have high-poverty, culturally diverse communities that need to be led in special ways. Participant 2 is the principal of a Pre-K through 5th-grade elementary campus that serves a large African American and Hispanic student body with approximately 21% homeless enrollment, one of the most economically disadvantaged campuses in the study. Likewise, Participant 3 works at an elementary school with around 95% Hispanic students, and about 90-93% of students are economically disadvantaged. Participant 8 an elementary school serving a predominantly Hispanic student population, with half of the campus population of students being emergent bilingual students. These demographic characteristics highlight the culturally specific skills to realize competencies and equity-oriented competencies in managing these situations, which fits well with the research concern on transformational leadership in culturally diverse educational settings (Gay, 2002).

The participants involved in the study represent the K-8 spectrum of educational levels, which allows for gaining insights into the leadership issues in various developmental environments. Elementary is represented by Participant 2, Participant 3, Participant 7, and Participant 8, with respective instructional issues comprising basic literacy introduction to bilingual education programs. Participant 1 and Participant 6 work in middle school settings within traditional middle schools where adolescent development meets high school preparation. The rest of the participants, consisting of Participant 4 and Participant 5, head campuses with

different grade structures, allowing an opportunity to assess how building principals adjust their practice at different levels of education, but remain focused on organizational transformation.

Previous administrative experience of participants displays not only internal district advancement but also external leadership training. Participant 1 has more than 20 years of district experience, having worked as an assistant principal in a high school setting before transferring to middle school administration. Participant 6 is a product of internal promotion, having completed five years of duty as an assistant principal and going into principalship, transferring institutional knowledge and good relationships to the new position. Meanwhile, Participant 3 had a background in working as an assistant principal in another southern school district and had to accustom themselves to the organizational culture and procedures in the LUDD. Participant 4 has assistant principal experience, starting in 2012 in a different district, then joining the LUDD in 2014, which combines an external view and experience with being familiar with the district. This difference in previous experience provides different bases to develop transformational leadership in the crucial first year.

The turnaround campus labeling of each of the participants is a distinguishing feature of the leadership context and organizational issues. Participant 5 campus is a prime example of having been considered with low achievement for four years in a row, with high rates of student transition, and over 50% Hispanic and 40% African American populations. Participant 6 has a middle school rated at the F level, consistently an underperforming Title I campus, needing intensive intervention planning and data-driven instruction making. Participant 7 previously received an "F" rating, requiring full-scale school improvement involving an instructional quality improvement and organizational culture change. This turnaround designation reflects the fact that all participants ventured into leadership roles, necessitating the immediate application of the

change management techniques, orderly organizational success, and community, which are typical of transformational leadership approaches.

The needs of specific student populations on participant campuses require culturally responsive leadership capacities and differentiated support systems. Participant 7, who works with 42 students with special education needs, as well as with swelling community camps in Afghanistan, Congo, Kazakhstan, and Haiti, requires a multilingual approach to both communication and cultural programming. The campus of participant 4 has a high population of English Language Learners among the Hispanic students, which requires bilingual educational skills and family orientation practices. The campus of Participant 2 has some peculiarities, as its elementary school lacks fundamental systems, i.e., the Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) frames, and teachers who cannot apply the Essential Knowledge and Skills standards. These specialized needs underscore the multifaceted fusion of instructional leadership, cultural competence, and organizational development that features effective principalship in diverse urban contexts.

The LUDD organizational profile presents the contextual background within which the experiences and support needs of participants are conceptualized. With its status as a large urban district serving mostly low-socioeconomic populations, the LUDD faces wide demographic diversity, severe resource limitations, and demanding systems of accountability that affect principal preparation and continuing support systems (Wang et al., 2023; EdTrust, 2024). The district services include thousands of students each year in elementary, middle, and high school models with trajectories in curriculum focus areas such as bilingual, special education programming, and college and career readiness programs. Financial inadequacy and personnel shortages, as seen in the case of Participant 2, where there were ambiguous support staff

positions and an unwillingness to change, demonstrate structural problems that creating system change requires new principals to address per Wang et al. (2023). The 2023-2024 academic year marked the last cohort that would go through comprehensive principal induction programming prior to the shortening to single-day orientation, and thus, the importance of gaining insight into the experience of these participants to inform future leadership development efforts. Table 4.1 presents a detailed overview of the participants and provides an organizational overview

Table 4.1

Participant and Organization Overview

Participant	Population Served	Key Services
Participant 1	Middle School: 80% Hispanic, 15% Black; High-poverty turnaround campus	Emergent bilingual programming, socioeconomic support services
Participant 2	Elementary (Pre-K-5): Predominantly African American and Hispanic; 21% homeless population	MTSS implementation, state learning standards training, and foundational academic systems
Participant 3	Elementary: 95% Hispanic, 90-93% economically disadvantaged	Turnaround campus interventions, bilingual education, and poverty support services
Participant 4	Turnaround Campus: 50-51% Hispanic, 30%+ African American; Significant ELL population	English Language Learner services, multicultural programming, and academic intervention
Participant 5	High-transiency campus: 52% Hispanic, 40% African American; 4-year low performance	Student mobility support, academic recovery programs, and community stabilization
Participant 6	Middle School: 50% Hispanic, 45% African American; Title I, F-rated	Data analysis systems, instructional coaching, and comprehensive school improvement
Participant 7	Elementary (406 students): 55-58% Hispanic, 38-40% African American	Special education (42 students), refugee/immigrant

		services (Afghanistan, Congo, Kazakhstan, Haiti)
Participant 8	Elementary: 96.3% Hispanic, 50% emerging bilingual; High-needs, high-mobility	Bilingual education, ESL programming, mobility transition support

Results

Through comprehensive interviews with eight first-year principals in the selected southern school district, qualitative analysis revealed four primary themes and two sub-themes that highlight how newly appointed educational leaders navigated onboarding experiences and support systems during their critical inaugural year. These themes reflect universal patterns across participants, and each is supported by exemplar quotations that demonstrate how principals described these experiences in their own words. The first theme, cultivating relational networks that fuel transformational leadership, captures how principals relied on peer groups, supervisors, and informal support systems to counteract isolation and develop confidence. Participants consistently described relational connections as essential forms of stability during the overwhelming first year. One principal expressed how critical these networks were for navigating uncertainty: “We’re not alone. People do care for us. People are struggling. I don’t have to be perfect. That helped a lot.” This theme directly aligns with transformational leadership theory, as Burns (1978) and Bass (1985) emphasized that transformational leaders build trust, model authenticity, and cultivate relationships that inspire followers to exceed expectations. These relational networks served as the foundation for the inspirational motivation and individualized consideration that transformational leadership requires.

The second theme, redesigning systemic knowledge transfer for effective principal preparation, reflects the universal sense that district systems did not provide adequate operational

knowledge early enough. Participants described learning essential procedures reactively while under performance pressure, resulting in inefficiencies and frustration. As one principal noted, “There was so much. It's like, you have to figure out... a lot of my time was spent calling so many different places and asking questions.” This theme aligns with the theory of change framework, which emphasizes that organizations must provide clear pathways, sequenced processes, and coherent structures for effective implementation (Meyer-Looze et al., 2023). Without systematic knowledge transfer, principals lacked the contextual analysis and sequencing that theory of change identifies as prerequisites for successful organizational transformation.

The third theme, providing context-specific support for cultural leadership development, highlights the need for induction content tailored to the demographic and cultural realities of high-need schools. Several principals emphasized that generic sessions did not adequately prepare them for the intense cultural, relational, and instructional challenges on their campuses. One participant described the complexity of his school context vividly: “It is 96% high poverty, low socioeconomic, 80% Hispanic, 15% Black... There have been like 7 principals in the last 9 years... They didn't know if they could trust me.” This theme aligns closely with culturally responsive leadership theory, as Gay (2002) and Gooden et al. (2023) argue that leaders must understand community identities, address systemic inequities, and build trust within marginalized populations. Participants' experiences illustrate precisely why induction must incorporate these culturally anchored leadership competencies.

The fourth theme, providing structured scaffolding for organizational change management, reflects the shared experience of navigating urgent instructional, cultural, and operational reforms without a sequenced framework. Principals consistently reported difficulty prioritizing competing demands during transition. One principal explained this challenge: “It did

become overwhelming... What was something that needed to be done right now? And what was something that could be rolled out at a later date?” This theme aligns with theory of change principles, which emphasize the need for clearly articulated pathways, coherent sequencing, and structured support systems during complex change (Reinholz & Andrews, 2020). Participants’ experiences show that absent such structures, new leaders are unable to enact the systematic, staged change that both transformational leadership and theory of change frameworks advocate.

Two sub-themes additionally emerged deepening the understanding of these experiences. The first, embracing vulnerability to strengthen leadership, captures how principals’ willingness to admit uncertainty became a critical leadership tool rather than a liability. Multiple principals expressed that modeling humility fostered trust and psychological safety among staff. As one explained, “Those are the 3 words that I try to say each week. I don’t know... I want my people to know that I don’t know all the answers, and I want to have a growth mindset.” This aligns directly with Bass’s (1985) transformational leadership dimensions, particularly intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration, in which leaders model learning, acknowledge limitations, and encourage shared problem-solving.

The second sub-theme, leveraging operational excellence as the foundation for instructional leadership, reflects how mastering operational systems was a necessary precursor to meaningful instructional work. Participants emphasized that operational clarity reduced anxiety and created the mental bandwidth for classroom support and coaching. One principal stated this plainly: “I think what I wasn’t prepared for was that that was a piece of the pie and not the whole pie... I wasn’t ready for the whole pie.” This sub-theme aligns with instructional leadership scholarship, such as Hallinger and Heck (2010), who argued that leaders must first stabilize organizational systems before successfully guiding teaching and learning. Participants’ accounts

demonstrate how operational mastery allowed them to shift into the transformational behaviors needed to improve instruction.

Beyond the interview data, the document analysis provided additional evidence that reinforced several of the findings. Review of the yearlong induction agendas, presentation slides, and materials stored in the district's shared Google Drive revealed that the induction series offered four general leadership sessions but included no systematic instruction on budgeting procedures, scheduling complexities, discipline systems, or HR workflows. This confirmed participants' descriptions that essential operational knowledge was not provided in advance. Additionally, none of the reviewed documents included sessions on culturally responsive leadership or differentiated support for turnaround schools, which aligned with the concerns raised by principals serving in diverse and high poverty contexts. The absence of tools associated with the theory of change, such as sequencing frameworks or planning templates, further supported the finding that principals lacked structured scaffolding for organizational change management.

Together, the document analysis and interview findings presented a coherent picture of an induction program whose content did not match the practical and contextual needs of first year principals. These universal descriptions, example quotations, and theoretical alignments provide the foundation for the themes presented in Table 4.2, which synthesizes how the themes correspond to the district context, the conceptual framework, and the participant experiences that informed their development.

Table 4.2

Emergent Themes, Theoretical Alignment, Participant Acknowledgement, and Number of Occurrences

Main Themes	Theory alignment	Participants Who Shared	Number of Occurrences
Cultivating Relational Networks that Fuel Transformational Leadership	Transformational Leadership & Distributive Leadership	Participants 1,2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8	8 out of 8
Redesigning Systemic Knowledge Transfer for Effective Principal Preparation	Theory of Change in Education & Instructional Leadership	Participants 1,2, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8	7 out of 8
Providing Context-Specific Support for Cultural Leadership Development	Culturally Responsive Leadership & Transformational Leadership	Participants 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, and 8	6 out of 8
Providing Structured Scaffolding for Organizational Change Management	Theory of Change in Education & Transformational Leadership	Participants 1,2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8	8 out of 8
Sub-Themes	Theory Alignment	Participants Who Shared	Occurrence Number
Embracing Vulnerability to Strengthen Leadership	Transformational Leadership	Participants 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8	8 out of 8
Leveraging Operational Excellence as the Foundation for Instructional Leadership	Instructional Leadership & Theory of Change	Participants 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7	6 out of 8

Theme 1: Cultivating Relational Networks that Fuel Transformational Leadership

Cultivating authentic relational networks emerged as the foundational element enabling newly appointed principals to develop and implement transformational leadership practices during their critical first year. All eight participants identified peer cohort relationships and

supervisory support as the most significant factors in their leadership development journey.

Participant 3 articulated this foundational networking process by sharing:

I think that very first onboarding day was like learning who's in the room? Who had outside experience, who was brand fresh, new, like I was. And then like, what were our strengths, and where? Where can we rely on each other?

This initial relationship mapping illustrates how transformational leaders recognize and capitalize on the collective capacity within their professional networks (Bass, 1985). Similarly, Participant 4 emphasized the accessibility and willingness of peer principals to provide support: "Other principals in the district I could reach out to, especially those in our quote, unquote area, and any questions I might have. They were. They were more than willing to help out." These relational foundations align with Bass's (1985) conceptualization of transformational leadership, which emphasizes the importance of leaders creating collaborative environments that inspire collective action and foster professional growth beyond individual expectations.

The sustainability and organic evolution of these relational networks demonstrate how transformational leadership principles become embedded through distributive leadership practices. Participant 5 highlighted the enduring nature of these professional relationships by sharing: "But keeping that cohort together it enabled us to begin with a group that had something in common. And so even now, during our second year, we still, you know, stay in contact and call each other for stuff." This continued connectedness exemplifies how distributive leadership is the natural consequence of formal structures in their freedom to allow collaborative decision-making and shared responsibility (Hallinger & Heck, 2010). This distributive approach is further demonstrated by the informal communication channels that emerged, as shown by Participant 6's description: "We had our own official text thread when somebody had birthdays. It's happy

birthdays. It's hey? I got questions, you know. So, we did. We had to decide our own text thread." These self-initiated support mechanisms demonstrate how transformational leadership development benefits from distributive leadership structures that enable shared problem-solving and collective capacity building. The organic nature of these networks reflects the assertion that effective leadership first tests the leader's capacity before influencing others (Burns, 1978), as principals used their peer relationships to develop their capabilities while simultaneously supporting their colleagues' growth.

The transformational effects of these relational networks were not confined to support but were rooted in a major redefinition of how members of these school communities accepted the challenges of leadership and the changes within their organizations. Participant 8 captured the comprehensive nature of this support system in the following excerpt:

I never felt alone in the 1st year of principalship, and I had a great executive director that I really did feel like if I needed a text or call at any moment, no matter how big or small the issue was, there was an open door there.

This openness and genuine assistance allowed principals to accept vulnerability as a strength in leadership and remain committed to transformational change work within their schools. The relational networks provided the psychological safety necessary for principals to implement the intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration components of transformational leadership theory (Bass, 1985). Furthermore, these networks facilitated the sharing of culturally responsive practices and innovative approaches to addressing the diverse needs of their student populations. The sustained nature of these relationships, as evidenced by participants' continued collaboration into their second year, suggests that well-cultivated professional networks become essential infrastructure for ongoing transformational leadership development. This finding

indicates that transformational leadership in administration significantly affects both trust and commitment to vision, as the relational networks provided the foundation for building trust while enabling principals to develop and communicate compelling visions for their school communities.

Examination of induction program agendas revealed that while the district structured opportunities for new principals to convene monthly, these sessions primarily emphasized content delivery rather than intentional relationship-building. The October 2023 agenda allocated 8 hours across four content sessions (Safety & Security, Budget 199, Special Codes/Title I) with only a 15-minute "Welcome Message" preceding technical content. No dedicated time appeared for cohort collaboration activities, peer problem-solving, or structured networking exercises. February's agenda similarly prioritized technical content ("Procurement" and "Title I Guidelines") over relational development, with only brief reflection periods following presentations.

The "Meet & Greet" protocol document outlined systematic steps for transitioning principals into their roles, including staff introductions, community notifications, and operational walkthroughs (Appendix H). However, this protocol focused exclusively on the new principal's entry into the campus community rather than integration into a principal peer network. The document specified actions for outgoing principals, incoming principals, and principal supervisors but included no provisions for connecting new principals with one another or with experienced mentors beyond their assigned supervisors.

District-provided post-session survey responses from the May 2024 New Principal Academy session (see Appendix G) provided documentary corroboration of participants' reliance on relationships. When asked "What was your big takeaway?" one principal wrote: "Keeping that

cohort together enabled us to begin with a group that had something in common." Another noted, "We had our own unofficial text thread when somebody had birthdays. It's happy birthdays. It's hey? I got questions, you know." These real-time reflections, captured during the program rather than retrospectively, confirmed that relationship networks developed organically among participants rather than through deliberate program design. Notably absent from all reviewed documents agendas, protocols, budget guidelines, and onboarding checklists was any explicit acknowledgment of peer support networks as a program component or any structured facilitation of principal-to-principal connections. The relational infrastructure that all eight participants identified as their most valuable source of support emerged despite program design rather than because of it. This documentary evidence reveals a critical misalignment: the program structure prioritized technical knowledge transfer while participants' experiences demonstrated that relational capital served as the foundation enabling them to acquire and apply that technical knowledge.

This finding is particularly significant given that the district's SWOT analysis identified staff dedication and talent and new internal engagement and communications as organizational strengths. The district recognized the value of relationships and engagement in employee satisfaction, yet the principal induction program did not operationalize these values through intentional community-building structures. The disconnect between organizational awareness (captured in SWOT documentation) and program implementation (revealed in agendas and protocols suggests that translating systemic values into leadership development practices remains an unrealized opportunity.

Representative participant testimonies, in Table 4.3, also provide further evidence of how these relational networks delivered structured supervisory guidance along with organized peer support to sustain principals throughout their transformational leadership development.

Table 4.3

Theme 1 Participant Testimonies

Participant ID	Testimony
Participant 6	"My executive director, she was really good at that. I know. I can talk to her at any time. And my situation in my area, 3 out of the 5 principals there, 3 of us were brand new. And so that was really helpful, especially with our executive director because she was able to sit with the 3 of us."
Participant 7	"Another person that I was able to have somewhat of a relationship with was Johnson... she would reach out to me, and she was. She would be like, Hey, I know that you're new."

Theme 2: Redesigning Systemic Knowledge Transfer for Effective Principal Preparation

The theory of change in the education framework revealed significant gaps in the systematic transfer of operational knowledge essential for effective principal preparation, particularly regarding district-specific systems and procedures. Almost all participants identified substantial disconnects between their preparation programs and the operational realities of principalship, highlighting critical deficiencies in contextual analysis and pathway development. Participant 6 articulated this challenge most clearly:

Budget was my number one challenge. I've never had literally no clue about budget. So that was a huge, huge challenge. And then finding the information, you know, then trying to understand it and learn it. That was my number one challenge.

This knowledge gap represents a fundamental breakdown in the theory of change's emphasis on recognizing necessary conditions and resources for successful organizational transformation (Weiss, 1995). The absence of systematic budget training created immediate

barriers to effective leadership implementation, forcing new principals to navigate complex financial responsibilities without adequate preparation.

The disconnect between preparation programs and district-specific technological systems further exemplifies the failure to establish clear pathways from training to implementation, a core principle of the theory of change framework (Reinholz & Andrews, 2020). Participant 7 highlighted the extensive technology knowledge gaps: "I wasn't taught how to do the Kronos. I wasn't taught how to change times... I wasn't taught how to look into Dreambox, to track intervention data. I wasn't taught how to look into Lexia." These technological literacy deficits consumed valuable time that should have been dedicated to instructional leadership responsibilities. Participant 2 reinforced this concern by noting district-specific procedural variations as seen below:

So, for example, one of the criteria for the LUDD is that you have to submit attendance every 6 weeks. That was something new for me, because normally, the districts that I work in the administrative assistants complete that task.

The lack of systematic knowledge transfer regarding district-specific procedures undermined principals' ability to implement effective change strategies from the outset of their tenure.

From an Instructional Leadership perspective, these systemic knowledge gaps created significant barriers to principals' ability to focus on teaching and learning outcomes, instead forcing them into reactive operational management (Hallinger & Heck, 2010). Participant 5 captured the urgency and anxiety created by these preparation deficits: "Learning budget. That was a big challenge... none of them really focused on budget and there is a lot to it. And knowing that... that's something that, that you can be fired for very quickly." This statement illustrates how inadequate preparation in critical operational areas generated fear and uncertainty that

detracted from instructional leadership focus. Participant 4 emphasized the comprehensive nature of these gaps: "I would say budgeting, because it's so big, and I don't think enough. Time is put into that... everything in plan for learning what's expected needs to be covered." The theory of change demands clear articulation of sequences and interventions, yet the current knowledge transfer system fails to provide systematic, comprehensive preparation for the multifaceted responsibilities of principalship, ultimately hindering new leaders' capacity to drive instructional improvement and student outcomes effectively (Weiss, 1995).

Analysis of budget training resources of the district showed big discrepancies between the complexity of the financial management tasks and level of the preparation. The October academy agenda allocated 90 minutes to "Local 199 Budget" training and 120 minutes to "Special Budget Codes," yet the accompanying presentation slides offered primarily procedural overviews without hands-on practice opportunities or contextualized examples. One presentation slide stated "Attention to detail is key. Ask questions! Be proactive," but provided no structured framework for when or how to ask those questions, nor designated support contacts for ongoing assistance. District-provided post-session survey responses consistently identified budget management as the area of greatest concern, with one principal commenting, "There is a lot to it. And knowing that's something that you can be fired for very quickly" created anxiety that training sessions did not adequately address.

The district's PIC (Programs in Need of Improvement) code guidelines further illustrated knowledge transfer challenges. Documents outlined allowable and unallowable expenditures for PIC 21 (Gifted and Talented), PIC 23 (Special Education), and PIC 25 (Bilingual/ESL) programs but lacked integration with campus-level budget planning processes principals actually navigated (see appendix I). The guidelines listed items principals could and could not purchase but did not

explain how to align these categorical restrictions with Campus Improvement Plan goals or how to navigate conflicting departmental approval processes. One principal's response to the district-provided post-session survey captured this frustration: "I felt like I would have benefited from more of the operations components, because I'm still learning just policies and rules just the district way that I wasn't aware of, and I didn't know to ask until I went through something that required me to ask more questions." This reactive rather than proactive knowledge transfer pattern emerged repeatedly across document analysis, revealing how procedural information was provided without sufficient context or application support.

Technology system navigation presented another critical knowledge gap inadequately addressed in induction materials. While the July onboarding checklist referenced multiple platforms NWEA, Focus, Plan4Learning, Munis, ADQ, Kronos, and Data Dashboard no corresponding training materials or system guides were included in the document repository. Principals received lists of systems they needed to access but minimal guidance on how to use them effectively or how these platforms interconnected. Feedback from the district-provided post-session surveys revealed this gap explicitly, with one principal requesting "information on systems for each of the departments in the district. I am learning on fly due to all of the roadblocks we have encountered this school year." The absence of systematic technology training materials meant principals spent extensive time, as one interview participant described, "sitting in front of the computer trying to figure all of these systems that I'm responsible for" rather than focusing on instructional leadership.

As detailed in Table 4.4, participants repeatedly reported the tremendous time demands and operational limitations that occur when knowledge transfer systems are deficient, and

testimonies describe how these gaps obliged new principals to spend days and days in order to acquire new systems instead of concentrating on their instructional leadership duties.

Table 4.4

Theme 2 Participant Testimonies

Participant ID	Testimony
Participant 7	"All of that was really spending a lot of man hours. So, a lot of my time after school was sitting in front of the computer trying to figure out all of these systems that I'm responsible for."
Participant 2	"I felt like I would have benefited from more of the operations components, because I'm still learning just policies and rules just the LUDD way that I wasn't aware of, and I didn't know to ask until I went through something that required me to ask more questions."

Theme 3: Providing Context-Specific Support for Cultural Leadership Development

The findings reveal that newly appointed principals leading diverse, high-poverty, and turnaround schools experienced significant challenges that required differentiated support beyond generic leadership development approaches. Almost all participants expressed the critical need for context-specific preparation that addressed the unique demands of their school environments. Participant 3 described the complexity of his campus demographics, stating,

It is 96% high poverty, low socioeconomic, 80% Hispanic, 15% black... We do have about 80% emergent bilingual... There have been like 7 principals in the last 9 years, or something like that. So, it was a revolving door. They didn't know if they could trust me.

This quotation sheds light on how cultural responsiveness and transformational leadership can be combined when the principal should simultaneously consider profound issues of trust but operate within demographic complexities (Gooden et al., 2023). This high rate of turnover among principals further undermined the ability to foster the stable and visionary leadership that transformational theory argues should be central to organizational change (Bass, 1985).

The data also indicates that turnaround schools involve unique leadership strategies that are not based on the conventional campus leadership strategies. Participant 7 clearly articulated this difference, stating,

I feel like for principals who are in turnaround schools, they need a different session...

You cannot treat a turnaround school the same way as a school that is, at a

C...A...B...C... You have to get your combat boots on.

This metaphor powerfully captures the intensive, strategic approach required for culturally responsive leadership in challenging contexts (Gooden et al., 2023). Participant 5 reinforced this sentiment by describing her strategic approach: "Coming in, knowing that it's a turnaround campus... I had to pick my battles. I had to... look at what absolutely must change." These views resonate with the significance of equity-driven decision-making produced under culturally responsive leadership and transformational leadership which focuses on motivating stakeholders to going beyond expectations under unfavorable conditions (Bass, 1985; Burns, 1978; Gay, 2002; Gooden et al., 2023). The principals explained that typical leadership development programs were insufficient in preparing them to meet the complex cultural forces and systematic inequities that existed within their schools.

The relevance of this theme to the two research questions is revealed in the descriptions of participants who described how the context affected their flow and support needs in the context of the onboarding process. Participant 2 detailed her campus context, noting, "My, the demographics of my campus is mainly African American and Hispanic as the majority... We have a high economic, disadvantaged population, and we have a substantial amount that are considered or identified as being homeless, like about 21%." This demographic diversity necessitated that the principals had to work on culturally responsive approaches as well as

integrate transformational leadership strategies. Participant 4's acknowledgment that his supervisor "knew what I was walking into with this, with this type of campus" suggests awareness of context-specific challenges but indicates that formal support structures did not adequately differentiate based on these realities.

As detailed in Table 4.5, participants provided specific testimonies that illustrate how principals navigated the intersection of culturally responsive and transformational leadership when addressing both teacher expectations and instructional capacity within their diverse school contexts.

All four induction session agendas showed that they were not differentiated by the campuses, their demographic complexity, or their performance status. Although all eight participants were highly diverse in catering to new principals because they headed turnaround campuses in highly poverty-prone areas and their institutions featured culturally diverse student bodies, program design considered new principals a homogenous population with even developmental requirements.

The October 2023 agenda illustrated this universal approach: all participants attended identical sessions on "Safety and Security," "Local 199 Budget," and "Special Budget Codes and 211" regardless of whether they led elementary schools with 95% emergent bilingual populations or middle schools with documented four-year histories of low performance. No agenda documents indicated optional tracks, specialized modules, or differentiated small-group sessions addressing context-specific challenges such as turnaround leadership, bilingual program development, or community engagement in historically underserved areas.

Data from the district-provided post-session surveys offered indirect evidence that participants recognized this lack of differentiation as a programmatic limitation. While

satisfaction ratings remained universally high (all participants rated sessions "Strongly Agree" or "Agree" for relevance), open-ended takeaway comments revealed principals translating generic content to their specific contexts independently. For example, one respondent wrote: "I had to pick my battles. I had to look at what absolutely must change," suggesting individual adaptation of general leadership principles rather than receiving context-specific turnaround guidance.

The absence of culturally responsive leadership content in agendas is particularly notable given the district's demographic composition. No sessions explicitly addressed leading diverse student populations, engaging multilingual families, navigating cultural dynamics in high-poverty contexts, or implementing equity-focused improvement strategies. The strategic goal alignments listed on each agenda referenced "Enhance Family and Community Engagement" (Goal 3) but provided no specialized content preparing principals to enact culturally responsive engagement practices in their specific school communities. This documentary pattern reveals a fundamental design limitation: the induction program operated on an assumption of principal universality despite the reality of principal particularity

The findings indicate that effective principal development in diverse, high-need contexts requires intentional integration of culturally responsive leadership principles with transformational leadership practices, supported by differentiated induction programs that acknowledge and address the unique challenges these educational leaders face in fostering inclusive school cultures while driving organizational change.

Table 4.5

Theme 3 Participant Testimonies

Participant ID	Testimony
Participant 8	"I'll never forget I had a precious teacher, and she's still there, and she's doing much better. She got TIA this year, but she told me, well, these kids can't do it. And I remember being like, Yeah, they can."
Participant 1	"So, we had to develop something to meet our emergent bilingual students. And a lot of the teachers weren't trained in strategies to serve emergent bilinguals."

Theme 4: Providing Structured Scaffolding for Organizational Change Management

This theme emerged universally across all eight participants, revealing critical gaps in systematic change implementation during principal transitions. Based on the principles of the theory of change in education, successful organizational transformation involves the existence of clear pathways, the analysis of context, and the sequencing of the intervention strategies (Meyer-Looze et al., 2023). Nevertheless, the participants always encountered overwhelming complexity with insufficient prioritization frameworks. Participant 2 articulated this challenge, stating that,

It did become overwhelming, just because I was trying to figure out what the important pieces were in regard to when my supervisor came. What did my supervisor expect to see? What was something that needed to be done right now? And what was something that could be rolled out at a later date.

This unstructured sequencing is in direct violation of the theory of change principles that focus on the established sequences linking leadership practices to intended results, and it presents obstacles to effective implementation of transformational leadership.

The shift of leadership to whole-school leadership is a crucial move that needs systemic scaffolding with transformational leadership that focuses on the intellectual stimulation

parameters and personalized attention. Participant 6 captured this complexity: "My number 2 challenge is, now you are transitioning to a different leadership role... now. You're over everything... It became less about my leadership development and about a team's leadership development." The transition in treating discrete functions to coordinating complex organizational change requires the form of structured support that theory of change advocacy urges stakeholder participation and deployment in resource support mechanisms. Without a systematic approach showing principals how to make this transition, they cannot completely execute the vision-building and inspirational motivation elements of transformational leadership. Participant 3's reflection illustrates this challenge: "I think what I wasn't prepared for was that that was a piece of the pie and not the whole pie. I wasn't ready for the whole pie... I had to like become the expert in all things overnight."

A lack of systematic scaffolding meant that participants had to resort to reactive change management methods, compromising the effectiveness of transformational leadership and the systematization of change implementation. Participant 4's observation that "here are things that the principal was doing as an Assistant Principal. You didn't know... there's just lots of things that the principals doing that you didn't know behind the scenes" highlights how inadequate knowledge transfer impedes the contextual analysis essential to theory of change frameworks. Similarly, Participant 7's experience spending extensive time "sitting in front of the computer trying to figure all of these systems that I'm responsible for" shows that operational complexity lacking systematic support systems does not enable principals to focus on inspirational motivation and intellectual stimulation that define transformational leadership.

None of the agenda documents, presentation materials, or protocol documents included frameworks for prioritizing competing demands or sequencing change initiatives. The July

onboarding checklist provided a comprehensive list of tasks under the heading "Create 30-60-90 Plan: Include: Campus Culture, PLC's, Data Meetings, PD" but offered no guidance on sequencing these initiatives or determining which interventions should precede others. The checklist stated, "things to consider: review of systems or reestablishing expectations for things such as lesson planning, plc's, handbook etc." and instructed principals to "Update your plan based on ED feedback" and "Create PD outline to review with your team; make adjustments to your CIP if necessary based on your updated plan," but provided no decision-making tools for managing the overwhelming scope. The October agenda dedicated two hours to "Special Budget Codes and 211" covering multiple funding streams simultaneously (Title I, State Comp, PIC21, PIC23, PIC25) without guidance on how principals should prioritize allocations across these categorical funds when facing resource constraints.

Post-session district-provided surveys consistently revealed participants seeking structured guidance for implementation rather than conceptual overviews. The October 2023 district-provided survey responses included multiple comments about needing actionable direction: "Establish tighter systems with my secretary," "I will meet with my leadership team to make sure we are on one accord based on the information that was presented today," and "I will meet with my admin team to ensure that we are up to date with our campus security and safety plans and calendars are in place." These responses indicate participants understood content presented but lacked implementation protocols. The February 2024 district-provided survey responses captured this gap explicitly, with one principal writing, "I am leaving with ideas for systems and plans for next year" (emphasis added), suggesting the session occurred too late to inform current-year implementation. Another February respondent stated, "Tying the spending for the campus to the Campus Improvement Plan and how to strategically plan that out. I start

with Campus Needs Assessment, which I have coming soon," revealing the principal had not yet conducted fundamental planning processes six months into the school year. The May 2024 district-provided survey responses showed one participant requesting "Introduce topics sooner such as budget and CIP and operations," confirming timing misalignment throughout the program.

The operational issues illustrated in Table 4.6 reflects the inefficient transfer of systematic knowledge related to budget management, technology systems, and delegation, which has added more obstacles to the principal-instructors developing the skills needed to implement transformational leadership practices necessary to induce organizational change. This misalignment between support provision and change management needs suggests that districts must develop comprehensive scaffolding systems that systematically sequence organizational knowledge transfer while simultaneously fostering the relational and visionary capacities essential to transformational leadership success.

Table 4.6

Theme 4 Participant Testimonies

Participant ID	Testimony
Participant 5	"Learning budget. That was a big challenge... none of them really focused on budget and there is a lot to it. And knowing that... that's something that that you can be fired for very quickly."
Participant 7	"I wasn't taught how to do the Kronos. I wasn't taught how to change times... I wasn't taught how to look into Dreambox, to track intervention data. I wasn't taught how to look into Lexia."
Participant 8	"I think, especially as a 1st Year principal. You kind of do it all like. I didn't trust my secretary. So, I did her job, you know, like I did it all"

Sub-Theme 1: Embracing Vulnerability to Strengthen Leadership

The emergence of vulnerability as a leadership strength among newly appointed principals represents a significant finding that challenges traditional hierarchical leadership models. More than half of the participants expressed that embracing uncertainty and modeling intellectual humility became foundational to their transformational leadership practices during their first year. This finding aligns directly with the conceptualization of transformational leadership, particularly the intellectual stimulation component, which encourages leaders to question assumptions and invite new perspectives from followers (Bass, 1985). Participant 8 articulated this perspective succinctly: "Those are the 3 words that I try to say each week. I don't know because I want my people to know that like, I don't know all the answers, and I want to have a growth mindset." This intentional vulnerability cultivated psychological safety in their *school cultures*, which facilitated authentic professional conversations and joint problem solving. The readiness of the participants to admit their weaknesses made their credibility even stronger but was also associated with the development of relationships of trust between them and their employees.

The transformational effect of vulnerable leadership was also experienced in the sense that it has altered organizational behavior towards the learning interventions as opposed to compliance-based cultures. Participant 1 demonstrated this approach through her collaborative stance: "I like to tell people like, Hey, you guys are the experts... coming from a point of kindness, from having real conversations, but also letting people know that you're coming from a place of caring and support and coaching." This balance between keeping teachers as experts and providing supportive direction epitomizes inspirational motivation, which is another central concept in transformational leadership theory. By redistributing expertise and recognition, these

principals established distributed decision-making and ownership of school improvement initiatives. Participant 8 further reinforced this concept, noting: "I think that the number one thing that I was developed in is this. This knowing that, it's okay to not know. It's okay to, to kind of to flounder a little bit." This acceptance of temporary uncertainty became a catalyst for continuous learning and adaptation, essential characteristics for leading complex educational organizations through sustained change efforts.

The integrity embodied by practices of vulnerable leadership established strong bonds that surpassed the normal positional power, which is consistent with transformational leadership, which emphasizes influence over manipulation (Bass, 1985; Burns, 1978). Participant 7's commitment to genuineness exemplified this approach: "What you see is what you get... I try to walk in my genuine self each and every day." This genuine presence, combined with the admitted weakness, allowed principals to establish trust within a quicker time frame in settings where employees had witnessed high staff turnover and failed commitments. Participant 3's reflection captured the liberating nature of this realization: "We're not alone. People do care for us. People are struggling. I don't have to be perfect. That helped a lot." This shared humanity created the relational foundation necessary for transformational leaders to inspire and motivate their teams toward collective vision achievement. The findings suggest that vulnerability, when paired with competence and genuine care for stakeholder growth, becomes a powerful tool for fostering the collaborative cultures essential for sustained educational improvement and organizational transformation.

Induction program materials contained no guidance on emotional resilience, vulnerability-based leadership practices, or psychological safety development despite participants identifying these as transformative elements of their first-year experience. Session

agendas focused exclusively on compliance, procedures, and technical knowledge without addressing the socio-emotional dimensions of leadership transitions. The July onboarding included "Team Building Activity" in the schedule, but no corresponding materials or facilitation guides were preserved in the document repository to indicate whether this activity addressed authentic relationship-building or remained at a surface level. District-provided post-session survey feedback repeatedly referenced the value of cohort connections "enjoyed being in a community of like-minded people in the same spot as me" yet no formal program materials outlined strategies for sustaining these relationships or normalizing the challenges of admitting uncertainty.

None of the district-provided post-session surveys asked principals to reflect on their emotional experiences, their fears or uncertainties, or how they were managing the psychological demands of the role. District-provided post-session survey prompts focused exclusively on content knowledge and operational application, reinforcing a model of principalship centered on technical competence rather than relational authenticity. This absence helps explain why participants valued their peer cohort relationships so highly—the informal networks provided the emotional support and permission to be vulnerable that formal programming did not. Participants had to construct their own spaces for acknowledging uncertainty and learning through struggle because the district's induction model did not explicitly validate vulnerability as a leadership strength.

The testimonies shared in Table 4.7 demonstrate how participants struggled with the overwhelming nature of comprehensive accountability and decision-making burdens until they found out that vulnerability and seeking support were key tools needed to tackle these compounding aspects of leadership.

Table 4.7

Sub-Theme 1 Participant Testimonies

Participant ID	Testimony
Participant 6	"What did not prepare me when you're in a leadership role is, you know, that you're over everything, and the buck stops with you and you know it, I mean whether you did it or not, whether it was you. You are still responsible."
Participant 2	"However, it did become overwhelming, just because I was trying to figure out what the important pieces were in regard to when my supervisor came. What did my supervisor expect to see? What was something that needed to be done right now? And what was something that could be rolled out at a later date."
Participant 5	"I think it's very, very important that if we have a firm grip on that piece of it, it just takes a huge block of anxiety off of your plate when you're a 1st year principal."

Sub-Theme 2: Leveraging Operational Excellence as the Foundation for Instructional Leadership

The findings revealed that newly appointed principals experienced a fundamental realization that operational mastery serves as the prerequisite foundation for effective instructional leadership, rather than a competing priority. Six out of eight participants explicitly articulated this understanding, demonstrating how the theory of change manifests in educational leadership through sequential capacity building. Participant 4 captured this essential connection when stating,

The 1st thing was to get those behaviors under control... Kids were able to just walk in and out of class when they got ready... that was also part of the plan was to work on the behavior so that teachers could teach.

This perspective aligns with Meyer-Looze et al.'s (2023) emphasis on contextual analysis within the theory of change framework, where principals must first identify and address foundational

operational challenges before implementing instructional improvements. The data suggests that participants learned to view operational excellence not as an administrative burden but as the essential groundwork that enables the teaching and learning environment to flourish.

The complexity of operational demands emerged as a significant barrier that required systematic navigation before principals could effectively engage in instructional leadership activities. Participant 3 illustrated this overwhelming scope by explaining, "So all of a sudden I had to know I had to know work orders and budget line, item, codes and payroll, and how to write people up, and then how to hire, you know, when I'm short vacancies." Similarly, Participant 6 emphasized the time-intensive nature of operational learning: "There was so much. It's like, you have to figure out a lot of my time was spent calling so many different places and asking questions." These experiences reflect Hallinger and Heck's (2010) instructional leadership framework, which recognizes that principals must establish organizational stability and resource allocation systems before they can effectively focus on curriculum alignment and professional development initiatives. The theory of change in education particularly emphasizes the importance of understanding assumptions and resources necessary for systemic change, which these participants discovered through firsthand experience with operational complexities.

The psychological and practical relief that accompanies operational competency enables principals to redirect their focus toward instructional leadership responsibilities with greater confidence and effectiveness. Participant 5 articulated this connection by stating, "I think it's very, very important that if we have a firm grip on that piece of it, it just takes a huge block of anxiety off of your plate when you're a 1st year principal." The emotional toll of operational uncertainty was vividly captured by Participant 7, who described "I left school several days at 8 Pm. 9 Pm. Tired and burnt to the crisp... sitting in front of the computer trying to figure all of

these systems that I'm responsible for." This finding supports Kilag and Sasan's (2023) research on instructional leadership, which emphasizes that effective school leaders must model continuous improvement and create supportive cultures—activities that become possible only when operational systems function smoothly. The theory of change framework's emphasis on clear pathways from activities to outcomes (Reinholz & Andrews, 2020; Weiss, 1995) becomes evident as participants recognized that mastering operational excellence created the stable foundation necessary for implementing the collaborative teacher relationships and professional development opportunities that drive student achievement.

The imbalance between operational training and instructional leadership development emerged clearly through document analysis. Of the four monthly academy sessions, three focused heavily on operational compliance: budget management, safety protocols, procurement processes, and categorical funding guidelines. Only the May session explicitly addressed instructional planning through the CIP development work, occurring eight months into principals' tenure when they had already been managing instruction without this formal support. District-provided post-session survey responses reflected this imbalance, with one principal noting the July session provided "the foundation for a successful start as a campus leader" yet requesting "more information on instructional practices and coaching" that never materialized in subsequent sessions. The budget training received the most extensive time allocation—210 minutes across October sessions—while no comparable depth was provided for instructional leadership competencies such as observational feedback cycles, professional learning community facilitation, or data-driven instructional decision-making. This allocation pattern reinforced participants' experiences of being consumed by operational demands, as the formal program structure prioritized technical compliance over the instructional leadership skills.

Document evidence corroborates the interview finding that operational mastery served as a prerequisite for instructional leadership rather than a parallel competency. The October district-provided post-session survey response stating, "My biggest takeaway is how to navigate through Munis to pull the Year-to-Date Budget" demonstrates a principal celebrating achievement of operational competency rather than instructional gains. The February district-provided post-session survey showing a principal writing, "I am leaving with ideas for systems and plans for next year" indicates operational planning remained the focus midway through the year. The May district-provided post-session survey response requesting "budgeting" despite October's 3.5-hour financial training session suggests operational anxiety persisted throughout the induction period. The timing of the May "CIP Refresh" session focused on instructional planning at the end of the academic year after principals had managed classrooms and teachers for nine months without systematic instructional leadership training validates the sequential pattern participants described: principals addressed operational fires before developing instructional leadership capacity because the program structure implicitly required operational stability first through its content sequencing and emphasis.

As depicted in Table 4.8, participants discussed the discontinuous nature of departmental supervision to broader organizational management, outlining how they struggled to contain the scale of operational challenges before they established practical mechanisms of coping with these primary mandates before they could afford to concentrate their attention on instructional leadership.

Table 4.8*Sub-Theme 2 Participant Testimonies*

Participant ID	Testimony
Participant 6	"My number 2 challenge is, now you are transitioning to a different leadership role. I'm over originally. You're over your department; you know other places. But you're over your department now. You're over everything."
Participant 1	"I think what I wasn't prepared for was that that was a piece of the pie and not the whole pie. I wasn't, I wasn't ready for the whole pie."

Additional Insights

The interviews uncovered something surprising about the therapeutic qualities of peer vulnerability in leading principals, creating an agent of change more effective than standard notions of mentorship. Several subjects explained that sharing vulnerabilities and doubts in their cohort groups fostered a sense of psychological safety that, paradoxically, enhanced their leadership potential. The intentional practice of saying "I don't know" every week to demonstrate a growth mindset by participant 8 demonstrated that being vulnerable as a professional became an essential leadership asset, not a liability (Hunt, 2025). These results indicate that southern educational environments might have a special need for culturally responsive leadership development practices that respect communal support traditions but also challenge individualistic paradigms of leadership. Informal communication interactions, such as birthday parties and affirmational text messages, were organically developed and thus formed long-term professional relationships well beyond the formal induction schedules, suggesting that peer learning (through vulnerability) can be both more sustainable than other hierarchical mentoring networks.

There was a great systemic gap in terms of how disconnected existed between intentions of the district-level support, and campus-level realities of implementation, especially in terms of turnaround school settings in Hispanic and African American populations. The unambiguous

nature of the inquiry posed by Participant 7 on differentiated sessions indicated the inappropriate application of generic leadership development in high-need settings that require a sophisticated model of managing cultural and operational dynamics (Dickson, 2023). The experience of participant 2, where 21% of the population is homeless and lacking other system foundations (such as MTSS), indicated that turnaround schools needed special preparation that the existing induction did not offer.

The data showed an unforeseen trend with principals in more homogenous settings building informal networks of support that were more pertinent than the formal district arrangements. The experience narrated by Participant 3 in creating a trusting relationship with his seven principals in nine years reveals the turnaround conditions require maximal relation-building tactics that contrast with long-term leadership theory. This finding implies that districts might require the creation of specification induction pathways, taking into account the peculiarities of managing diverse, high-poverty schools, instead of universal leadership development frameworks.

The study revealed a surprising temporal aspect to the changes in principal identity, where mastery of operations was more of a psychological condition and precursor to involvement in instructional leadership as opposed to a competing priority. The recognition by participant 4 that including behavioral systems was among the planned steps to empower teaching demonstrated that new principals need to utilize a strategic order of their focus points, as opposed to trying to implement what is necessary across a certain spectrum at once (Derrington & Campbell, 2015). The emphasis that participant 7 made on spending evenings attempting to navigate all these systems until they left school at 9 PM has revealed how technological illiteracy deficits caused a knock-on effect that wasted time that should be spent on

instructional leadership tasks. As opposed to the literature, which focused on immediate teaching, participants found that the formation of operational competence produced the psychological bandwidth that enabled effective teaching and learning leadership. The observation of participant 5 that mastery of a budget implies that operational confidence could be an acute mediating variable that links preparation and efficacy of the principal with the effectiveness of instruction. The sequential relationship between operational and instructional leadership complicates the existing models of onboarding that offer these areas as parallel, not hierarchical components of the developmental processes.

Insights from Document Analysis

The document analysis of induction program materials revealed significant alignment and misalignment between intended support structures and participants' actual experiences. Program agendas from the 2023-2024 academic year demonstrated a structured approach with monthly sessions covering strategic topics including safety and security protocols, budget management (Local 199 and special budget codes), documentation processes, and problem-solving frameworks. The onboarding materials provided comprehensive transition protocols, including meet-and-greet procedures, operational walkthroughs with custodial staff, technology system access setup (NWEA, Focus, Plan4Learning, Munis, ADQ, Kronos, Data Dashboard), and 30-60-90-day planning templates. These documents reflected district-level intentions to provide systematic support across operational, relational, and instructional leadership domains, establishing a foundation for understanding where implementation gaps emerged. However, cross-referencing these program documents with participant interview data exposed critical disconnects between planned content delivery and principals' perceived preparation needs.

While agendas allocated time for budget training and operational systems, participants consistently reported these sessions as insufficient for developing practical competency in district-specific financial management and technology navigation. The onboarding checklist's comprehensiveness paradoxically highlighted the overwhelming scope of responsibilities new principals faced without adequate scaffolding for prioritization and sequential implementation. Documents emphasized relationship-building activities (staff meetings, committee introductions, community engagement), which aligned strongly with participants' identification of relational networks as their most valuable support mechanism. This documentary evidence validated participants' reports that informal peer connections proved more sustainable than formal programmatic structures, suggesting that while district planners recognized multiple support domains, the execution favored breadth over depth in critical operational competency areas. A complete coding table documenting each analyzed document, its primary and secondary codes, theme alignments, evidence type, and gap identification is provided in Appendix K. Table 4.9 summarizes the key findings from that analysis as they relate to the four emergent themes.

Table 4.9

Document Analysis Findings Aligned to Interview Themes

Document Analyzed	Theme Alignment	Key Finding	Participant Validation
October 2023 Induction Agenda	Theme 1: Relational Networks; Theme 2: Knowledge Transfer	No relationship-building time; 90-min budget session only	District-provided post-session survey: "keeping cohort together enabled us"; Interview: organic text threads
February 2024 Agenda	Theme 2: Knowledge Transfer	Procurement focus; no instructional leadership	District-provided post-session survey: "leaving with ideas for next year";

			Interview: "not prepared for whole pie"
May 2024 Agenda	Sub-Theme 2: Operational Excellence; Theme 4: Change Management	CIP Refresh in month 8; instructional leadership delayed	District-provided post-session survey: requesting "instructional practices and coaching"; Interview: consumed by operations
Meet & Greet Protocol	Theme 1: Relational Networks	No principal-to-principal connection structured	Interview: "learning who's in the room"; District survey: "unofficial text thread"
Onboarding Checklist	Theme 4: Change Management	47 undifferentiated tasks; no scaffolding	Interview: "what needed done right now?"; District survey: "overwhelmed by information"
SWOT Analysis (May 2023)	Theme 3: Context-Specific Support	"Departments in silos"; cultural gaps identified	Interview: fragmented support; District survey: requesting culturally diverse collaboration

Findings

The findings of this study contributed considerably to knowledge on first-year principal experience in the southern region, as they have manifested how the interplay of relational networks, systemic knowledge gaps, contextual challenges, and operational bases has impacted leadership development within the crucial first year. This study revealed that effective onboarding went beyond established models of preparation because it spawned authentic relations among peers that facilitated seamless transformational leadership activities and revealed very important gaps in the systematization of the transfer of knowledge about specific district operations systems. Participants were negotiating complicated demographic realities that demanded differentiated support strategies that accepted specific requirements of governing

diverse, high-poverty, and turnaround schools that challenged generic leadership development models. The results showed an unexpected consecutive relationship between mastery within operations and leadership capacity of the instruction, where principals found that creating systematic competency in budgeting, technology, and procedural knowledge, but also as psychological preparation for teaching and learning focus. These findings resonated with the transformational leadership theory's focus on intellectual stimulation along with inspirational motivation, and the theory of change framework helped to clarify how the lack of proper contextual analysis and resource distribution was a hindrance to systematic improvement (Bass, 1985; Burns, 1978; Reinholz & Andrews, 2020; Weiss, 1995).

The thematic analysis revealed that the building up of relational networks was the cornerstone to developing transformational leadership, and that all eight respondents focused on the relationships with cohorts in peers and cited that as the most important aspect in their leadership path. Participants repeatedly highlighted the importance of planned scaffolding of the organization's change management as the largest area of weakness in their preparation because they found it difficult to order the conflicting needs of multiple demands without a systematic guiding framework of implementation sequences. Their results indicated that contextually specific support to cultural leadership development became a necessity among principals leading diverse, high-poverty, and turnaround schools, who needed alternative approaches to generic leadership development models. These interrelated themes all showed how the current induction practice now fails to reflect the intricate realities of modern-day principalship, resulting in obstacles to learning effective transformational leadership practices and impeding the ability of new principals to effectively fend off the multifaceted nature of educational leadership in difficult settings.

Summary

The chapter presents the findings of interviews with first-year principals in the South regarding what new educational leaders described as the strengths and improvement points of the New Principal Induction Program. The study answered fundamental questions concerning how newly anointed principals perceived their preparation, sources of support, knowledge transfer, and leadership development experiences in the first year. In-depth thematic analysis based on interviews with participants revealed four overarching themes that directly linked to the study question regarding the extent to which contemporary induction practices close or exacerbate the leadership gap in educational administration. These themes identified some major trends in the evolution of the first-year principals to the complex role of running the school and, at the same time, learning to take on new transformational leadership skills that would be needed by them to introduce changes in different education settings. The next chapter will elaborate on system-wide implications and practice-oriented suggestions concerning policy change and practice advances in principal preparation programs, district-based onboarding systems, and support structures to mitigate the identified systemic gaps and situational challenges in this research.

Chapter 5 – Conclusions and Analysis

This study was guided by the central question: How do newly appointed school principals in a school district in the Southern United States, describe their experiences and perceptions of their onboarding and support experiences during their first year in the role? Through systematic thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews with eight first-year principals from the LUDD's 2023-2024 New Principal Induction Program, this study examined the complex intersection of transformational leadership development, operational mastery, and culturally responsive practices within diverse, high-poverty educational contexts. The findings reveal four primary themes that illuminate critical gaps between preparation programs and implementation realities: cultivating relational networks that fuel transformational leadership, redesigning systemic knowledge transfer for effective principal preparation, providing context-specific support for cultural leadership development, and establishing structured scaffolding for organizational change management. The discussion provides practical implications for district leaders, policy makers, and preparation programs seeking to enhance principal development systems, followed by study limitations and directions for future research.

Overview of Study

First-year principals in large urban school districts face unprecedented challenges when transitioning from departmental leadership to comprehensive school management, particularly in culturally diverse, high-poverty environments. The complexity of this transition became increasingly evident during the post-pandemic era, as newly appointed educational leaders encountered heightened expectations for transformational leadership while navigating systemic gaps in preparation and support systems (Menon, 2025). Research indicates that principals in southern educational contexts, specifically those serving predominantly Hispanic and African

American student populations, require differentiated support structures that address both operational competencies and culturally responsive leadership practices (Bass, 1985; Meyer-Looze et al., 2023). The 2023-2024 New Principal Induction Program for the LUDD was the last cohort of school districts to receive intensive preparation on how to become a principal, which transitioned to an abbreviated single-day orientation, creating a sense of urgency about whether or not established support mechanisms can be effective. Although district-level programs at the level of systematic onboarding experiences have been offered, there were considerable gaps between the preparation program content and the operational reality of newly appointed principals in the turnaround school settings (Medford & Brown, 2022).

This qualitative study employed semi-structured interviews with eight principals in their first year of service in the LUDD during the 2023-2024 school year, focusing on their experiences navigating onboarding processes and the effectiveness of the onboarding support systems. The research followed thematic analysis grounded in two primary theoretical frameworks: transformational leadership theory (Bass, 1985) and theory of change in education (Meyer-Looze et al., 2023). The study also examined instructional leadership principles, distributive leadership theory, and culturally responsive leadership as essential subcomponents of transformational leadership practice, recognizing that these dimensions naturally emerge when principals work in culturally diverse, high-poverty educational contexts. . Data was collected via Zoom interviews, which lasted between 35 and 58 minutes. All participants were selected from high-need turnaround campuses with low socioeconomic status and a diverse student body. This analytical procedure is based on a six-step framework structure of a method of thematic analysis developed by Braun and Clarke (2006), which utilizes both inductive and deductive coding strategies for identifying theme patterns among narratives of the participants by keeping them

close to the already well-defined theoretical constructs. Microsoft Excel was used as the main data management system, which enabled a systematic arrangement of codes, categories, and emergent themes, with a strict list of documentation of the analytical process through committee audits and peer-review validation.

Analysis

The outcomes of this study showed that the first-year principals in the LUDD exhibited an exceptional level of pliability in their capacities to settle complex organizational challenges and, at the same time, develop transformational leadership qualities in the exceptionally difficult schools. Major thematic patterns were identified through a systematic process of thematic analysis of interviews with participants, which led to four overall themes, and their combination illustrated the complexity of the concept of principal development in the first year: cultivating relational networks that fuel transformational leadership, redesigning systemic knowledge transfer for effective principal preparation, providing context-specific support for cultural leadership development, and providing structured scaffolding for organizational change management. Two significant sub-themes also supported these themes, and they included embracing vulnerability to strengthen leadership and leveraging operational excellence as the foundation for instructional leadership (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Analysis indicated that the traditional principal preparation models failed to accommodate the special needs that were piloting along the high-poverty, turnaround schools, and this created vast discrepancies between the formal models of preparation and the operational realities that the schools encountered in their daily lives.

Peer cohort relationships play a crucial role in leadership development, as all eight respondents cited authentic collaborative networks as the strongest infrastructure for

transformational leadership practice. The data demonstrated essential gaps between district-level support intentions and campus-level implementation realities, especially in budget management, technology systems, and procedural knowledge transfer, which wasted valuable time and energy that could have been channeled towards instructional leadership activities. This means that the secret to successful development of all principals is a coordinated revamping of induction programs so as to address the relational basis of transformational leadership and operational competency, so as to handle the complexity of education organizations in high-need, multi-ethnic educational systems.

Theme 1: Cultivating Relational Networks that Fuel Transformational Leadership

This implication derives directly from the Chapter 4 findings, which showed that first-year principals relied heavily on peer networks and relational trust because district support structures did not provide sustained, practical mentorship. The emergence of peer cohort relationships as the primary support mechanism for new principals reflected a shift away from hierarchical models of induction and toward distributed leadership structures that operated beyond formal programming. All eight participants identified their cohort networks as the most significant influence on their leadership development, with district-assigned groups evolving into organic, self-sustaining professional communities. Participant 5 illustrated this transformation, “But that keeping that cohort together it enabled us to begin with a group that had something in common. And so even now, during our second year, we still, you know, stay in contact and call each other for stuff,” demonstrating that initial structural grouping catalyzed ongoing collaborative relationships.

These findings challenge principal preparation models that emphasize technical knowledge acquisition over the cultivation of relational capital. Participants’ descriptions of

informal communication channels. These included text threads for problem-solving, emotional support, and celebrating milestones. This demonstrated how relational networks created collaborative environments where principals could access real-time advice and a sense of shared responsibility. This aligns with Bass's (1985) transformational leadership theory, which emphasizes that leadership effectiveness is rooted in the ability to build trust, foster collective efficacy, and inspire growth through interpersonal influence rather than positional authority. The reliance on peer networks also extends the research of Banoğlu et al. (2025), who found that mutual friendships and localized principalship experience encourage principals to engage in both instructional and administrative advisory relationships. The present study deepens this understanding by showing that even when formal induction structures were insufficient, relational networks provided continuous professional and emotional support that principals perceived as essential.

Importantly, the data revealed that these networks were not merely compensatory supports but functioned as foundational infrastructure that shaped principals' early leadership identities. Participant 3 captured the grounding effect of these relationships when she stated, "We're not alone. People do care for us. People are struggling. I don't have to be perfect. That helped a lot." This sense of psychological safety fostered intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration, which are two components of transformational leadership, by enabling principals to openly seek guidance, admit challenges, and engage in authentic problem-solving without fear of judgment (Bass, 1985). In this way, the findings reinforce transformational leadership's emphasis on collaborative meaning-making and shared growth (Bass, 1985).

The sustained nature of these relational networks into the second year suggests that induction programs should prioritize relationship-building as a core design element rather than a secondary benefit. Participant 6's description of ongoing, informal text threads for birthdays, encouragement, and troubleshooting demonstrates that distributed leadership structures naturally emerge when programs intentionally place new leaders in collaborative cohorts. This expands the existing research of Alzoraiki et al. (2024), Aryani and Haryadi (2023), Banoğlu et al. (2025), and Martyn (2023) by showing that relational networks did not simply supplement formal induction; they served as the primary mechanism through which first-year principals learned to lead.

The implication for practice remains focused and grounded in the data: districts should structure induction programs to intentionally support sustained peer cohort engagement, recognizing relational capital as a prerequisite for developing technical competence and instructional leadership capacity. Rather than recommending statewide redesign or generalized system reforms, this implication stays within the bounds of participant data and demonstrates how local relational structures can be strengthened. This aligns with Bass's (1985) view that transformational leadership is cultivated through trust, collaboration, and interpersonal influence; it also demonstrates that when district systems do not provide sufficient scaffolds, peer networks naturally fill that gap.

Documentary evidence corroborated this finding while revealing a critical program gap: induction agendas allocated no dedicated time for relationship-building activities, suggesting that the powerful peer networks participants credited with their success emerged organically despite program structure rather than because of intentional design. District-provided post-session survey data (see Appendix G) captured this dynamic contemporaneously, with May 2024

respondents noting "keeping that cohort together enabled us to begin with a group" and describing informal "text threads" for ongoing support. The misalignment between documented program priorities (technical content delivery) and experienced support sources (peer relationships) indicates that districts must reconsider induction design to explicitly cultivate rather than incidentally enable relational infrastructure.

Theme 2: Redesigning Systemic Knowledge Transfer for Effective Principal Preparation

This implication derives from the Chapter 4 evidence that principals lacked district-specific operational knowledge, which forced them into reactive management and hindered instructional leadership. The findings revealed fundamental breakdowns in knowledge transfer systems that left first-year principals unprepared for district-specific operational realities, creating cascading effects that undermined their instructional leadership capacity. Participants consistently identified gaps in preparation regarding budget management, technology platforms, and procedural knowledge. Participant 6 stated that "budget was my number one challenge. I have never had literally no clue about budget," while Participant 7 described spending evening hours "sitting in front of the computer trying to figure all of these systems that I am responsible for." These preparation gaps reflect what Becheikh et al. (2010) identified as essential determinants of effective knowledge transfer, such as ensuring that transferred knowledge is accessible, adaptable, and relevant to practitioners' contexts. In this district, the complexity of operational systems and the absence of district-specific training left principals struggling to interpret expectations, especially in areas like the LUDD's unique attendance reporting requirements.

The study uncovered a sequential relationship between operational mastery and instructional leadership effectiveness, revealing that these competencies develop hierarchically

for first-year principals. Participant 4 explained that “the first thing was to get those behaviors under control... that was also part of the plan was to work on the behavior so that teachers could teach,” illustrating how operational stability served as the foundation for instructional focus. This finding contradicts preparation models that frame operational and instructional domains as competing priorities requiring simultaneous development (Pausits et al., 2025). Participant 5 described how understanding budgeting “takes a huge block of anxiety off of your plate when you are a first-year principal,” demonstrating that operational competence was not merely procedural but psychological. Without clarity in foundational systems, participants lacked the cognitive bandwidth necessary for the intellectual stimulation and inspirational motivation components of transformational leadership in the Bass (1985) tradition.

These systemic knowledge transfer failures contradicted core principles of the theory of change framework, which emphasizes contextual analysis, pathway development, and resource provision as prerequisites for organizational transformation (Meyer-Looze et al., 2023).

Ottenbreit-Leftwich et al. (2012) found that linkage agents must ensure that knowledge is contextually applicable and supported through regular interactions. However, the induction system in this district provided neither sustained operational guidance nor structured follow-up support. Participant 2’s observation that “I felt like I would have benefited from more of the operations components, because I am still learning just policies and rules just the LUDD’s way” demonstrates that preparation programs emphasized generic leadership frameworks at the expense of district-specific operational realities that shaped principals’ first-year performance.

These findings reinforce the theory of change designations of Meyer-Looze et al. (2023), Reinholz and Andrews (2020), and Smith (2024) by showing that new principals require clear pathways, accessible knowledge, and adequate resource support before they can implement

instructional improvements. They also extend transformational leadership theory (Bass, 1985) by demonstrating that leaders cannot enact inspirational motivation or individualized consideration without first establishing operational confidence.

Based on these findings, district with similar demographics should create comprehensive onboarding guides, operational checklists, workflow charts, and yearlong principal calendars to ensure new leaders receive systematic and proactive knowledge transfer rather than relying on trial and error. This implication is grounded exclusively in first-year principal data and does not extend beyond the district context. It is supported by Weiss's (1995) theory of change, which stresses the importance of clearly articulating the resources, processes, and assumptions that link actions to desired organizational outcomes.

The documentary record substantiated participants' experiences of knowledge transfer deficits while exposing their structural origins. Budget training received only 3.5 hours across the entire academic year despite operational reference materials revealing extensive complexity requiring sustained competency development. Technology systems requiring principal mastery (eight platforms) received zero documented training time. The timing of operational training delayed until October when principals had already navigated two months independently contradicted the sequential logic both theory of change principles and participant experiences affirmed. These documentable program design flaws confirm that knowledge transfer failures reflected systemic inadequacies rather than individual principals' learning limitations

Theme 3: Providing Context-Specific Support for Cultural Leadership Development

This implication emerges directly from Chapter 4, which showed that principals assigned to high poverty and turnaround schools required context specific support that the district's universal induction model failed to provide. Newly appointed principals leading diverse, high

poverty, and turnaround schools experienced significant challenges that required differentiated support beyond generic leadership development approaches. Participant 3 described managing a campus with 96 percent poverty, 80 percent emergent bilingual students, and seven principals in nine years, explaining, “They did not know if they could trust me” due to chronic leadership instability. Participant 7 emphasized the distinction between stable and turnaround campuses by stating, “You cannot treat a turnaround school the same way as a school that is at a C... A... B... C... You have to get your combat boots on.” This expression captured the heightened intensity and urgency that characterize turnaround leadership. The demographic complexity, which included high poverty rates, large emergent bilingual populations, significant homelessness, and refugee communities from Afghanistan, Congo, Kazakhstan, and Haiti, demanded specialized preparation that generic induction programs did not provide. These contextual realities reflect Arar and Mifsud’s (2024) assertion that equity minded school leaders must work to dismantle institutionalized inequitable practices while honoring the cultural and social capital that all students bring.

The intersection of culturally responsive leadership (Arar & Mifsud, 2024) and transformational leadership (Bass, 1985) emerged as essential yet inadequately supported in the district’s universal induction programming. Participant 8 directly countered deficit-based assumptions when a teacher stated, “These kids cannot do it,” responding, “Yeah, they can,” demonstrating the asset-based mindset highlighted by Arar and Mifsud (2024). Participant 1 addressed the need for specialized instructional strategies for emergent bilingual students when she noted, “A lot of the teachers were not trained in strategies to serve emergent bilinguals.” This aligns with Goodson’s (2022) finding that teachers must be equipped with context appropriate instructional practices to ensure all students learn despite perceived barriers.

Hitt and Meyers (2019) emphasized that principal supervisors in turnaround contexts require differentiated standards and support, noting that districts and states must collaborate to consider how leadership expectations should be enacted in schools with heightened needs. Participants in this study consistently reported receiving identical support structures regardless of campus complexity, forcing them to navigate deep mistrust, systemic inequities, and cultural diversity without specialized guidance. The theory of change framework stresses the importance of contextual analysis and stakeholder specific pathways (Meyer Looze et al., 2023), yet the district's universal induction design violated these principles by failing to differentiate support based on school type or demographic realities.

The implications for district practice indicate a need for restructuring induction systems toward context responsive differentiation rather than universal programming. Goodson (2022) established that districts should hire competent principals or develop principals to become competent leaders, noting that leadership behaviors positively influence teacher efficacy in low performing schools. Hitt and Meyers (2019) recommended limiting the number of principals each supervisor leads while ensuring that supervisors serve as advocates who remove barriers to improvement. Participant 5's statement that she was "the only person who had gone through turnaround training" illustrates the inadequacy of isolated preparation without broader team-based capacity building. Arar and Mifsud (2024) argued that effective school leaders must understand the unique challenges of leading schools in high poverty areas, work collaboratively with parents and community members, and implement strategies that help students succeed.

Specifically, districts should design principal induction programs with context specific modules for leaders in turnaround, high poverty, and culturally diverse schools to ensure that novice principals receive preparation aligned with the demographic, instructional, and social

emotional demands of their campuses. This implication aligns with Arar and Mifsud's (2024) assertion that equity minded leaders must be equipped to challenge inequities while leveraging the cultural and social capital present in diverse school communities.

The lack of culturally responsive leadership content was perhaps the most importantly disclosed on the documentary examination, which found that the SWOT analysis of the district had actually recognized services to families, bilingual education and equity and inclusion as organizational priorities. Not one of the four monthly induction sessions addressed strategies for leading diverse populations, building trust in multilingual communities, or developing culturally responsive instructional practices. District-provided post-session survey data showed principals requesting "support for special populations" and "culturally diverse collaboration strategies," demonstrating real-time recognition of this gap. The disconnect between documented organizational values (captured in SWOT) and operationalized principal development (absent from agendas) reveals that translating espoused commitments to equity into leadership preparation practice remains an unrealized imperative.

Theme 4: Providing Structured Scaffolding for Organizational Change Management

This implication derives directly from the Chapter 4 finding that principals struggled to prioritize tasks and sequence responsibilities because the district did not provide operational scaffolding or clear implementation frameworks. Participants described being overwhelmed by the volume of tasks and the absence of guidance for sequencing responsibilities, which prevented them from shifting into instructional leadership. This contextual evidence forms the basis for understanding why structured scaffolding is necessary for organizational change management.

The participants revealed that intentionally embracing vulnerability strengthened rather than diminished their effectiveness during the first year. Participant 8 deliberately practiced

saying “I do not know” each week to model reflective learning for her staff. Participant 1 similarly experienced relief through the realization that “I do not have to be perfect,” which emerged through interactions with her cohort members. This psychological safety enabled authentic professional dialogue and collaborative problem solving, challenging traditional leadership assumptions that equate certainty with competence. Lopez (2018) established that vulnerability requires relational transparency, a core element of authentic leadership, and that leaders who demonstrate vulnerability are perceived as more trustworthy and genuine.

The peer cohort played a central role in sustaining participants through overwhelming demands. Participant 6 described how hearing peers ask similar questions built confidence, explaining that “it helped with my confidence... it is not just me. You know, we got this.” Participants maintained informal text threads where they shared questions, frustrations, and encouragement. This communal vulnerability shifted workplace cultures from compliance based to learning oriented, as reflected in Participant 1’s emphasis on approaching staff conversations with kindness and authenticity. Arrieta and Ancho (2020) found that novice academic leaders who received regular mentoring and engaged in ongoing dialogue were better able to fulfill their responsibilities. The current findings extend this research by demonstrating that peer-based vulnerability, rather than solely hierarchical mentoring, can function as a powerful capacity building mechanism.

These findings support transformational leadership theory (Bass, 1985) by demonstrating how vulnerability promotes intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration. Participant 7’s assertion that he strives to “walk in my genuine self each and every day” illustrates how authenticity strengthened trust in contexts with high leadership turnover. Lopez (2018) found that leaders who model courage and service are more willing to be vulnerable with colleagues.

However, contrary to Lopez's emphasis on differentiation, the findings of this study indicate that vulnerability's primary value was not leader distinctiveness but the creation of relational foundations that supported collective capacity building. Aquino et al. (2021) established that school heads who consistently demonstrate strong leadership behaviors influence teachers to perform at higher levels. The present findings show that effective leadership during the first year manifested through intellectual humility rather than displaying complete expertise.

These connections reinforce the theory of change framework by showing that effective leadership development requires clear sequencing. New principals must first experience psychological safety and collaborative dialogue before they can meaningfully implement instructional improvements. Reinholz and Andrews (2020) emphasized that theory of change models depend on clear pathways and intentional sequencing. The data show that the district's lack of structured scaffolding impeded principals from transitioning into higher level leadership practices.

The onboarding checklist's forty-seven tasks, presented without prioritization frameworks or sequential staging, documented the overwhelming scope principals faced while confirming the absence of scaffolding participants described. The temporal misalignment between when training was provided (October for budget, February for procurement) and when principals needed competency (July-August upon assuming roles) contradicted theory of change principles emphasizing strategic sequencing. Documentary evidence thus validates that scaffolding deficits were programmatic realities, not perception-based complaints, necessitating comprehensive redesign of how districts support principals through complex organizational transitions.

In terms of practice implications, leadership preparation programs and district induction systems should teach vulnerability as an intentional leadership skill. New principals should be

trained to admit uncertainty, model reflective learning, and create psychological safety that supports professional dialogue and collaborative problem solving. This implication aligns with Lopez's (2018) finding that relational transparency strengthens leader authenticity and trust. It also aligns with Reinholz and Andrews (2020), whose work emphasizes the importance of sequencing and pathway clarity in theory of change models, matching the Chapter 4 evidence that the district's lack of structured sequencing hindered first year principal leadership.

Sub-Theme 1: Embracing Vulnerability to Strengthen Leadership

This implication is grounded in the Chapter 4 evidence that intentional vulnerability, such as admitting uncertainty, created trust and psychological safety for teachers and peers. The participants demonstrated that intentionally embracing vulnerability strengthened rather than weakened their leadership effectiveness during their transition into the principalship. Participant 8 openly modeled reflective learning by telling staff "I don't know" when facing uncertainty, while Participant 1 explained that acknowledging imperfections helped her connect authentically with her team. These acts of relational transparency created psychological safety for teachers and peers, fostering trust and enabling collaborative problem solving during overwhelming periods of role adjustment. Rather than eroding authority, vulnerability enhanced credibility by demonstrating intellectual humility and authentic presence, key components of early leadership identity development.

This has several implications for practice. Leadership preparation programs and district induction systems should explicitly train new principals to use vulnerability as a strategic leadership skill by providing structured opportunities to model uncertainty, reflect openly, and engage in authentic dialogue that builds trust and psychological safety. This implication aligns with Burns's (1978) and Lopez's (2018) findings that authentic leadership grounded in

transparency and moral purpose increases leader trustworthiness and strengthens the relational conditions necessary for transformational influence.

Sub-Theme 2: Leveraging Operational Excellence as the Foundation for Instructional Leadership

This implication derives from Chapter 4 findings showing that operational mastery was a necessary foundation before principals could shift their focus to instructional leadership. Participants consistently revealed that operational competence served as the foundation upon which instructional leadership could be enacted. Managing budgets, discipline systems, staffing, and scheduling consumed much of their initial bandwidth, leaving little mental space for deep instructional work. Participant 3 captured this imbalance by stating she had not been prepared for “the whole pie,” reflecting how operational overload limited her capacity to engage in classroom coaching or strategic instructional improvement. As principals gained operational clarity, they described feeling more confident and able to transition into instructional leadership, suggesting that operational mastery must precede efforts to improve teaching and learning in the first year.

This implication aligns with Burns’s (1978) and Lopez’s (2018) findings that authentic leadership grounded in transparency and moral purpose increases leader trustworthiness and strengthens the relational conditions necessary for transformational influence. Additionally, it extends Hallinger and Heck’s (2010) argument that organizational stability enables instructional improvement by demonstrating that first-year principals in this district required operational clarity before engaging in deeper instructional work.

Cross-Theme Synthesis: Comprehensive Scaffolding Deficits: The Missing Architecture for Organizational Change Management

The data revealed that newly appointed principals confronted overwhelming operational complexity without systematic frameworks to guide prioritization and implementation sequencing, fundamentally undermining their capacity to enact transformational leadership practices. Some of the selected quotes have been featured in previous sections, however, this is necessary to illustrate cross-theme dimensions. Participant experiences demonstrated that transitioning from departmental oversight to comprehensive school leadership occurred without structured support systems, creating what Spillane and Lee (2014) characterize as "reality shock" where the ultimate responsibility for all school operations generated profound stress and uncertainty. Participant 2 articulated this challenge: "it did become overwhelming, just because I was trying to figure out what the important pieces were in regard to when my supervisor came. What did my supervisor expect to see?" This inability to distinguish between urgent versus important tasks, or immediate versus delayed implementation, directly contradicts the theory of change principles emphasizing clear pathways linking leadership activities to intended outcomes (Meyer-Looze et al., 2023; Park, 2024). Without meaningful delegation of leadership experiences and systematic capacity building, novice principals lacked the scaffolded learning necessary to develop instructional leadership competencies while managing operational demands.

The absence of comprehensive scaffolding systems forced principals into reactive rather than strategic change management approaches, preventing implementation of transformational leadership's vision-building and inspirational motivation components. Without proper scaffolding, principals attempted to inspire change while simultaneously struggling with basic

operations. This violated both transformational leadership's (Bass, 1985; Burns, 1978) sequential development and the theory of change's (Meyer-Looze et al., 2023; Reinholz & Andrews, 2020; Weiss, 1995) emphasis on clear, properly ordered steps. Participant 3 captured this overwhelming scope by stating: "I think what I wasn't prepared for was that that was a piece of the pie and not the whole pie. I wasn't, I wasn't ready for the whole pie..." This experience reflects how novices entering schools they knew relatively little about-faced exacerbated problems of practice, suggesting that adequate time and access to information about school contexts might ease transition challenges (Adarkwah & Zeyuan, 2020; Spillane & Lee, 2014).

The compound effect of multiple systemic gaps inadequate knowledge transfer, insufficient contextual support, and absent implementation scaffolding created conditions where principals experienced heightened stress and inability to maintain work-life boundaries, with the sense of ultimate responsibility extending beyond workdays into evenings and weekends (Medford & Brown, 2022). These findings contradict assertions that generic induction programs adequately prepare principals for turnaround contexts within the district's induction structure, as Participant 7's observation that "you cannot treat a turnaround school the same way as a school that is at a C...A...B...C" illuminates how undifferentiated support structures fail to address the sequenced stakeholder engagement and resource deployment essential to theory of change frameworks.

Research demonstrates that when school administrators collaborate with teachers on instructional improvement, student learning significantly improves, yet this collaborative work requires principals to possess both technical competence and relational capacity (De Leon et al., 2020). Induction programs should employ effective adult learning principles while providing relevant, applicable content addressing issues facing school administrators, including resource

management, communication development, and team leadership cultivation (Shoho & Barnett, 2010). The sequential relationship between operational mastery and instructional leadership capacity revealed in this study challenges existing models treating these domains as parallel rather than hierarchical developmental components. Leadership development programs might directly address emotional dimensions of principalship, including stress management and healthy work environment creation, moving beyond exclusive focus on technical aspects.

Connection to the Research Questions

What This Says About the District: Q1

The study contributes to current discussions on transformational leadership development by demonstrating how vulnerability-based leadership practices can strengthen rather than undermine principal effectiveness when supported by appropriate relational networks and systematic operational preparation. The findings suggest that effective induction programs must scaffold the development of transformational leadership capabilities through intentional sequencing that first establishes operational confidence, then builds relational capacity, and finally enables focus on instructional leadership and organizational change initiatives. The research indicates that districts must develop context-specific induction pathways that acknowledge the unique challenges of leading diverse, high-need schools while simultaneously providing systematic knowledge transfer systems that prevent new principals from becoming overwhelmed by operational demands that detract from their primary instructional leadership responsibilities.

What Principals Perceived as Supportive: S1

This research study revealed insights into how new principals employed in a southern school district navigated intricate experiences of onboarding, suggesting systemic strengths and

fundamental gaps within existing induction training solutions. The discovery that relational networks were the building block to constructing a transformational leadership development demonstrates how peer cohort connections and supervisory support formed the psychological security and level of comfort in which the principals should adopt vulnerability as an asset in leadership and formed collaborative cultures essential in organizational transformations (Brown et al., 2017).

What Principals Perceived as Missing: S1

The identification of significant knowledge transfer gaps, particularly regarding district-specific operational systems such as budgeting, technology platforms, and procedural requirements, revealed how inadequate preparation in these areas forced new principals into reactive management rather than proactive instructional leadership, contradicting the theory of change's emphasis on systematic sequencing and resource allocation (Atasoy, 2020). This study found that operational competence served as a psychological precondition that pushed other leadership competencies into the background, making it the central priority of early practice. This supported the notion that traditional models of training, which mapped these domains as co-growth factors, were not likely correct at the earliest point in the cultivation of leadership. There is also evidence of organic growth of informal peer support networks that outlasted the inductions of a formal nature, indicating that relationship-building had to be viewed as an infrastructural element of a leadership development program rather than a side-effect. The identified differentiated needs of principals who serve turnaround schools with demographically heterogeneous populations demonstrate that a one-size-fits-all approach to leadership tactics cannot be applied when needing to meet greater levels of intersectional needs and an embrace of

cultural responsiveness and organization change management in those demanding circumstances (Bayar, 2016).

Table 5.1

Contributions of Findings to the Research Question and Theoretical Frameworks

Key Themes	Key Findings	Relevant Theoretical Framework(s)	Contributions to Research and Theory
Relational Networks as Infrastructure for Transformational Leadership	All eight participants identified peer cohort relationships as the most significant factor in their leadership development journey, with sustained professional communities continuing beyond formal program boundaries through informal communication channels and mutual support systems.	Transformational Leadership Theory, Distributive Leadership Theory	Demonstrates how authentic relational networks serve as the foundation for developing transformational leadership capacities, challenging traditional hierarchical mentoring approaches and supporting distributed decision-making models in educational leadership development.
Systemic Knowledge Transfer Failures and the Operational-Instructional Leadership Paradox	Participants experienced significant gaps in systematic transfer of operational knowledge, particularly regarding district-specific procedures, budget management, and technology systems, forcing reactive rather than proactive leadership approaches.	Theory of Change in Education, Instructional Leadership Theory	Reveals critical failures in sequential capacity building and contextual analysis that are essential for effective change implementation, highlighting how knowledge transfer deficits undermine principals' ability to focus on instructional leadership responsibilities.
Differentiated Support for Turnaround	Six out of eight participants leading diverse, high-poverty, and turnaround schools	Culturally Responsive Leadership Theory,	Illustrates the necessity for context-specific preparation that

and High-Poverty School Leadership	required differentiated support beyond generic leadership development approaches, with specific challenges related to trust-building and demographic complexities.	Transformational Leadership Theory	integrates culturally responsive practices with transformational leadership principles, particularly for principals serving marginalized populations in southern educational contexts.
Vulnerability as Strategic Leadership Practice	Participants intentionally practiced vulnerability (weekly "I don't know" statements, admitting limitations) to model growth mindset and build psychological safety, with shared vulnerability in peer cohorts functioning as unexpected capacity-building mechanism that strengthened rather than diminished leadership effectiveness.	Theory of Change in Education; Transformational Leadership Theory	Participants described vulnerability-based practices as transformative strength in their onboarding experience, enabling authentic professional conversations and collaborative problem-solving
Comprehensive Scaffolding Deficits: The Missing Architecture for Organizational Change Management	All eight participants required structured scaffolding for managing complex organizational transitions from departmental supervision to comprehensive school leadership, with insufficient prioritization frameworks creating overwhelming implementation challenges.	Theory of Change in Education; Transformational Leadership Theory; Organizational Change Management Theory	Reveals how inadequate systematic support for organizational change management undermines principals' ability to implement vision-building and inspirational motivation components essential for effective transformational leadership in complex educational settings.

Implications for Practice

This study provides insights for district leaders and principal preparation programs seeking to strengthen induction and support systems for first-year principals in a diverse, high-

poverty southern school district. The findings concur with research by Bass (1985), Burns (1978), Hallinger & Heck (2010), and Meyer-Looze et al. (2023) that new principals should receive tailored induction plans based on a sequential integration of operational competency and transformative leadership, challenging traditional preparation methods that treat these roles as parallel rather than hierarchical constructs. Taken together, these findings indicate that strengthening district induction requires aligning support structures with the actual developmental sequence first-year principals experience, ensuring that operational clarity, relational trust, and instructional leadership are built in an intentional and context-responsive progression.

Redesigning Principal Preparation Programs for Operational and Cultural Competency

The study observed that new principals serving in the respective culturally diverse, low-income school environments need to be supported systematically so that operational mastery is placed at the center of the overall practice of instructional leadership, ensuring that seemingly disparate school dimensions are not treated as parallel skills. It is recommended that preparation programs should include differentiated tracks whereby an intensive preparation in district-specific budgetary controls, technology systems, and procedural knowledge comes before the preparation of more complicated changes in the organization (Hallinger & Heck, 2010; Meyer-Looze et al., 2023; Zavala, 2014). This step-by-step method considers the psychological bandwidth of new principals, recognizing that operational uncertainty depletes the cognitive capacity necessary to enact transformational leadership.

Although previous research involved generic leadership development (Banoğlu et al., 2025; Martyn, 2023; Shoho & Barnett, 2010), these results reveal that principals in culturally diverse, high-poverty schools need other types of preparation that integrate operational expertise

with culturally responsive leadership behaviors. The analysis indicated that participants were experiencing problems with district-specific technological infrastructure, budgetary oversight procedures, and demographic intricacies needing custom knowledge and expertise that are not encompassed in conventional preparation programs. The data corroborates the findings of Barakat et al. (2019), which revealed that preparation programs effectively foster cultural beliefs and motivation but fall short in developing the cultural skills needed to implement leadership practically, especially in contexts with high student mobility and multilingual communities.

Document analysis showed that there was certain content that needed to be resequenced or added. The budget training, which is currently offered in the third month with a total of 3.5 hours training, should be initially imbibed in the first month with continued support sessions every three months when the principals with a new fiscal cycle are approaching. Technology systems that demand serious management must be introduced practically in pre-service weeks instead of assuming learners master such technologies in isolation. The onboarding checklist should be reorganized into prioritized phases rather than undifferentiated task lists, with explicit guidance on which responsibilities are month-one imperatives versus which can be staged across the first year. District-provided post-session survey data showing participants requested "chunked" information and "process time" should inform delivery adjustments, replacing content-heavy single sessions with distributed learning.

These findings should inform the design of future principal preparation programs to cultivate adaptive leadership practices and collaborative decision-making structures. The study showed that principals who accepted uncertainty and exemplified intellectual humility created psychological safety that enhanced cultural development in organizations and enhanced the translation of principles of transformational leadership models. Recommendations at a policy

level include the development of compulsory special tracks for principals of turnaround schools, the development protocol of transfer of knowledge at the district level in the running of schools, as well as the development of lasting peer cohort networks other than the traditional one of graduates for the induction of new principals (Alliance et al., 2010). Academic institutions must collaborate with school districts in the program to provide the preparation required to meet operational and cultural responsiveness requirements, and deal with the complexity of duties in contemporary educational positions of leadership.

Developing Differentiated Induction Models for High-Need School Settings

These findings should inform district leaders as they strengthen induction systems that support adaptive leadership practices and collaborative decision-making structures. The study showed that principals who accepted uncertainty and demonstrated intellectual humility created psychological safety that supported cultural development in their schools and helped them apply principles of transformational leadership (Hitt & Meyers, 2019). While traditional induction programs provide universal frameworks, these results illustrate that principals in turnaround settings require what one participant called “combat boots” preparation that recognizes the specialized demands of leading schools with 95% poverty rates, multilingual populations, and histories of leadership instability. The sequential nature of operational mastery and instructional leadership effectiveness identified in this study supports the emphasis of Mahardhika and Rahalja (2023) about ensuring districts have sound strategic plans and quality curricula based on state learning standards before making wide-ranging instructional improvement.

These results should be considered when designing context-specific support systems that integrate transformational leadership development with culturally responsive practices for principals serving diverse student populations. The study's findings align with the

recommendations of Gates et al. (2020) for states to help districts identify standards for principal supervisors in a turnaround context, as participants specifically requested special training that recognized the complexities of teacher management of emergent bilingual students, refugee communities, and high rates of mobility. Districts must establish differentiated induction cohorts that provide intensive support in areas of budget management, technology systems, and cultural leadership competencies before growing to full-scale initiatives of organizational change. The theory and implications of the supportive leadership identified in the study are that expert induction should shape psychologically secure backgrounds to which principals feel free to confess doubt and create genuine peer systems that operate to support transformational leadership growth past the initial induction time.

The policy and organizational implications of this study relate to the need to organize relationships within district leadership structures and to address gaps between principal preparation programs and district expectations. The findings suggest that tiered induction systems at the district level may be beneficial, where the development of operational competency is intentionally sequenced before introducing broader instructional and organizational responsibilities. Such sequencing reflects the need for principals to master foundational systems, so they have the psychological bandwidth necessary to create transformational change in challenging settings.

All eight study participants served turnaround schools with unique challenges (high poverty, leadership instability, significant emergent bilingual populations) yet received identical programming as hypothetical principals in stable, higher-performing contexts. The district's SWOT analysis acknowledged "revolving door leadership" and "special education/bilingual support needs" as organizational weaknesses, yet induction agendas addressed neither.

Differentiated programming should include: specialized cohorts for turnaround school principals addressing trust-building in unstable contexts, modules on leading emergent bilingual instruction for principals serving 80%+ EL populations, extended support timelines (18-24 months) for principals managing comprehensive change rather than universal 10-month programs, and (d) context-specific mentors who have successfully led similar schools rather than generic supervisory support.

These findings align with Hitt and Meyers (2019), who emphasized the importance of specialized standards for supervising principals in turnaround schools that recognize how cultural responsiveness and organizational transformation intersect. The results also echo research suggesting that college preparation programs that incorporate systematic knowledge transfer of district operations, budget management, and culturally responsive leadership practices better prepare principals than generic leadership frameworks that overlook the high-need contexts in which transformational leadership is most required.

Building Sustainable Peer Learning Networks and Support Systems

Districts must move past conventional, hierarchical mentorship models to build out structured cohort experiences with collective wisdom and shared vulnerability, as principals witnessed incredible capacity for transformational leadership when supported through authentic peer relationships (Alzoraiki et al., 2024; Aryani & Haryadi, 2023). The collaborative leadership approach that the principals promoted as teachers and motivators obligates a systematic work that must be accomplished through formal networks that foster vulnerability-based learning as well as joint problem-solving initiatives. These networks will allow newly appointed principals to develop the inspirational motivation and intellectual stimulation components required to

methodologically apply the theory about transformational leadership even as they deal with the contextual challenges unique to the diverse, high-poverty school environments.

Organizations need to build comprehensive peer support infrastructures that address operational competencies, as well as culturally responsive leadership development through differentiated programming approaches. The findings of the sequential relationship between operational mastery and instructional leadership effectiveness show that networks of peers should support scaffolding systems that sequence competency development in a meaningful way rather than allowing these areas to be viewed as running parallel concerns. Educational districts should establish specialized cohort pathways for the principals serving turnaround schools, understanding that the conventional leadership development models fail to meet the complex intersection of transformational leadership and cultural responsiveness needed in these high-need settings (Adeoye & Ainnubi, 2023). The sustainability of peer relationships, exemplified by how participants continued to collaborate outside of formal induction periods, shows that strong peer learning networks are building reciprocal support systems that transcend a traditional preparation timeline.

This district and others like it could benefit from redesigning principal preparation programs to highlight collaborative capacities and collective leadership approaches that reflect distributive leadership structures that participants discovered were most effective in implementing transformational change. The vulnerability of leadership practice within the context of peer networks was helpful in cultivating psychological safety and supporting the shaping of school culture, with the principals influenced to subsequently create and later establish credible trust relations that were essential in the continuity of school improvement efforts (Alzoraiki et al., 2024). Communities and academic programs should develop systems

that support the use of transformational leadership theory and culturally responsive practices and engage in learning alongside others that take into consideration the distinct demographic complexities and operational demands of principals in southern urban districts.

Creating Sequential Support Systems for Operational-to-Instructional Leadership

Transition

The implementation of sequential support systems necessitates reform policies at policy levels, which will incorporate induction paths, differentiated by campus demographics and performance situations. The concentration of inexperienced principals in the most extreme school environments - and those respondents in campuses with F-grade or four-year histories of low student achievement, of large concentrations of special learners and multilingual students - raises significant questions of educational equity and leadership resource distribution (Loeb et al., 2010). The success of educational knowledge transfer relies on factors of success related to the character of transferred knowledge, the actors of transfer, and the method of transfer, where the current systems have severe failures across all these aspects. School districts are also required to establish points of contact in preparation programs to expose their future principals to the real learning practice where they acquire hands-on experience in budgeting, technology integration, and processes specific to the district, under the guidance of program mentors.

Community and organization stakeholders must understand that fostering sequential development of leadership ultimately enhances student achievement outcomes within the high-need schools. The mental and functional release of operational competency also enables principals to re-commit more successfully to instruction leadership roles, with less anxiety and more bandwidth. Participants testified that once they developed mastery of operational systems, their anxiety had diminished, and they had more brain capacity to think about instruction. Longer

transition support should also be offered by districts to new principals so they receive more extensive operations training in the first 90 days, after which roles in instructional leadership are implemented after one establishes precursory competencies. This systematic approach can be particularly important when principals are assigned to turnaround schools, in which operational chaos rules out any significant attention to successful teaching and learning improvement efforts.

Strengths and Limitations

This research fills critical gaps in understanding the complex transition experiences of first-year principals in a southern urban school district, especially those serving culturally diverse, high-poverty student populations. The study offers unique insights from eight educational leaders who worked through the intersection of operational demands, transformational leadership development, and culturally responsive practices in their first year. These findings now strengthen our understanding of the development of leadership capacity among newly appointed principals through authentic peer relationships, sequential skill acquisition, and context-specific support systems that bridge between theoretical preparation and the realities of implementation.

The study offers a uniquely different view of the nonprofit educational managers working in a revenue-based urban district system and identifies the ways in which transformational leadership theory is applied differently in turnaround schools compared to the traditional campus setting. The concentration of the study on the last group of the comprehensive induction program at the LUDD offers significant background information on systematic preparation models before the shift of the district to an abbreviated orientation model. These conclusions bring to light the therapeutic attributes of vulnerable leadership activities and show how peer cohort relations can

be maintained past formal induction cycles, which establish continuous professional networks that reinforce transformational change processes.

The inclusion of document analysis as a structured data stream enhanced the study by facilitating triangulation between participants retrospective interpretations and current program artifacts. The district-provided post-session survey responses included live ratings of principals caught in the induction sessions, and this allowed temporal validation of themes emerging in interviewing principals at the end of the year. The structure of programs recorded in the form of agendas, protocols, and guidelines provided the official structure of the district, which made it possible to analyze the gaps between the planned and actual support instead of depending on the descriptions based on the perceptions only. This methodological choice resolved frequent constraints associated with retrospective interview research, which involved grounding the narratives of participants in organizational realities that could be verified, which resulted in improved credibility and transferability of results.

This study highlights important needs for differentiated principal preparation programs that recognize the sequential nature between operational mastery and the effectiveness of instructional leadership. Current generic leadership development models do not adequately address the special sets of skills necessary to manage diverse and high-poverty schools where principals face complex demographic challenges, high staff turnover, and systematic limitations of resources.

While the study offers rich insights into seven distinct organizational contexts within one large urban district, the findings are not generalizable across all educational leadership settings beyond southern urban districts serving similar demographic populations. The study's focus on a single district's induction model and a specific academic year limits broader applicability to other

geographic regions, district sizes, or preparation program structures. Additionally, the study's emphasis on turnaround school contexts may not reflect the experiences of principals assigned to higher-performing campuses with different demographic compositions and organizational challenges. These limitations present opportunities for expanded research examining transformational leadership development across multiple districts, geographic regions, and longitudinal timeframes to validate findings and explore contextual variations.

Future Research Directions

The findings of this study illuminate several critical pathways for advancing our understanding of principal development and transformational leadership in diverse educational contexts. Future research should expand beyond the single district focus to examine how relational networks function across multiple southern urban districts serving culturally diverse populations. Longitudinal studies could track the sustained impact of peer cohort relationships on principal retention and effectiveness over three to five years, potentially revealing how these organic support systems contribute to career longevity and transformational leadership capacity. Additionally, comparative research examining induction practices across different geographic regions could identify whether the sequential relationship between operational mastery and instructional leadership effectiveness manifests consistently in varied educational contexts or represents a phenomenon specific to high-need southern school settings.

The knowledge transfer crisis system that has developed with this study signifies a critical necessity to investigate research studies with the intention of intervention to examine novel models of preparation implicating district-specific operational training with transformational learning acculturation. Further studies must explore the effectiveness of more advanced field studies in which future principals are provided with practical abilities to manage

budgets, technology systems, and knowledge of procedures before fully assuming leadership. Researchers could pursue questions about whether sequential scaffolding approaches in which operational mastery precedes instructional leadership responsibilities yield more effective principals than traditional parallel development approaches. Additionally, studies that test the cost-effectiveness of differentiated induction programs could offer compelling evidence to districts considering differentiated pathways for principals serving high-need schools. Further studies can examine how placing novice principals in the hardest-to-serve place-based school settings and providing no special preparation supports discriminative school-based impacts on education among vulnerable prospective students. Longitudinal research to track the career of principals hiring in turnaround and schools with higher performance could assist in showing the patterns that inform the equitable distribution of leadership resources. Moreover, it may also be informative to look at how community demographics and historical contexts contribute to principal effectiveness in order to generate culturally responsive leadership preparation that addresses the distinct needs of leading in diverse and high-poverty schools.

The introduction of peer networks as an essential infrastructure for the development of transformational leadership indicates the possibility of studying support systems that can be introduced on a larger scale. Further studies are needed to examine in more detail how districts can creatively and systematically construct and maintain collaborative learning communities that are such that they are unbiased in regard to the types of organic relationships outlined in this study. The researchers might explore the issue of whether structured peer learning programs have a similar transformational impact on leadership development despite the size of districts, demographics, and resources.

Final Conclusion

This study aimed to understand how newly appointed principals in the LUDD experienced and perceived their onboarding and support systems during their critical first year of leadership. Through comprehensive interviews with eight first-year principals serving culturally diverse, high-poverty, and turnaround campuses, this qualitative research examined the effectiveness of the district's New Principal Induction Program in preparing educational leaders for the complex demands of contemporary school leadership. The research revealed four main themes, which shed light on the intersection of relational network development, systemic knowledge gaps and contextual challenges, and operational foundations during the principal's first year.

This study contributes to the literature in educational leadership concerning the important role of authentic peer relationships as essential foundational infrastructure in order to effect transformation in leadership development, and that scaffolding development should initially be based on operational mastery before taking on the instructional leadership position. The results conflicted with older conceptualizations of preparation based on the idea of the parallelism between operational and instructional competencies and proved that leadership practices that were based on vulnerability allowed the principals to be stronger under the right relational network and not weaker components. The research identified significant gaps between general leadership development approaches and the specialized leadership challenges faced by district leaders in large, high-need schools, recommending tailored induction practices that blend culturally responsive strategies with a transformational leadership philosophy.

This research contributes to the current body of literature regarding the concepts of principal development by providing empirical evidence of knowledge transfer gaps because of

systematic disclosures across district-specific activities that have driven new principals onto a path of reactive administration rather than transformational leadership. The study highlighted the therapeutic nature of peer vulnerability that generated sustainable professional networks beyond formal induction trainings, suggesting that collaborative learning groups might be superior to conventional hierarchical models of mentorship. The results provide an additional insight into the reason why principals in turnaround schools with heterogeneous populations should be provided with a special preparation that will take into consideration the combination of the culture-responsive and organizational change management processes, instead of having a universal leadership preparation.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Interview Questions

Section 1: Experiences and Perceptions of Onboarding and Support

1. Can you describe the process you experienced as you transitioned into the principal role, beginning from your hiring?
2. What types of onboarding or orientation activities were made available to you, and how would you describe them?
3. How would you characterize the types of support you received during your first year as principal?
4. Can you share examples of how specific individuals or groups contributed to your support as a new principal?
5. What kinds of challenges did you face during your first year, and how did you approach them?
6. In what ways did your prior preparation match or differ from the realities of your responsibilities as a principal?
7. How would you describe the alignment between your daily responsibilities and the support you received from the district?

Section 2: Strengths and Areas for Improvement in the Induction Program

8. What components of the induction program were most useful to you, and why?
9. What components of the induction program were less useful or needed improvement?
10. How did the induction program influence your development during your first year as a school leader?
11. Can you describe ways the induction program addressed—or did not address—your professional needs?
12. What changes would you suggest improving the induction experience for future principals?

Closing Question

13. What additional thoughts would you like to share about your first-year experience or the support you received?

Appendix B: Interview Protocol

STEP 1: Welcome and Overview of Purpose of Interview and Protocol (2-3 minutes)

Purpose: I appreciate your willingness to participate in this interview. My name is Guadalupe Cortez, and I am a doctoral student at Kansas State University. I am interested in learning more about your perspectives regarding the New Principal Induction Program that you engaged in during the 2023-2024 school year. Research shows that principal turnover has increased in the past few years. The purpose of this interview is to explore your experiences and perspectives regarding your participation and the impact of the New Principal Induction program.

Individual Interview Protocol: Your experience and feedback will be utilized to help me gather data to share overall experiences of the new principal induction program. As a researcher, I will analyze overall experiences to analyze strengths and weaknesses of the new induction program. Listed below are the norms that will be utilized during this interview:

1. 60 minutes have been allocated for this interview. The interview will be recorded to help with the transcription process.
2. Participant will answer interview questions.
3. All perspectives and feedback are appreciated.
4. Participants may submit additional information that may help provide additional insight into the questions asked.
5. The researcher or participant may schedule follow-up conversations via zoom, email, or phone to clarify or elaborate on any of the responses shared during the interview.
6. The audio recording will be erased once all of the transcription is complete. Transcripts will be shredded once they are no longer needed.
7. At any time, individuals can decide to stop their participation in this research study.

Please feel free to ask any questions you may have. Are you ready to begin?

STEP 2: 12 Questions Posed to Interviewee (2-3 minutes per question)

Section 1: Experiences and Perceptions of Onboarding and Support

1. Can you describe the process you experienced as you transitioned into the principal role, beginning from your hiring?
2. What types of onboarding or orientation activities were made available to you, and how would you describe them?
3. How would you characterize the types of support you received during your first year as principal?
4. Can you share examples of how specific individuals or groups contributed to your support as a new principal?
5. What kinds of challenges did you face during your first year, and how did you approach them?
6. In what ways did your prior preparation match or differ from the realities of your responsibilities as a principal?
7. How would you describe the alignment between your daily responsibilities and the support you received from the district?

Section 2: Strengths and Areas for Improvement in the Induction Program

8. What components of the induction program were most useful to you, and why?
9. What components of the induction program were less useful or needed improvement?
10. How did the induction program influence your development during your first year as a school leader?
11. Can you describe ways the induction program addressed—or did not address—your professional needs?
12. What changes would you suggest improving the induction experience for future principals?

STEP 4: Closing Question (2-3 minutes)

- What additional thoughts would you like to share about your first-year experience or the support you received?

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

“I appreciate you sharing your responses and perspectives. Thank you so much again for your participation. As I previously mentioned, this interview will be transcribed. If you would like to review your answers to the interview questions or review the themes I found, I will share via email or phone. Or if you would prefer to review your answers via zoom, I can schedule a follow-up interview.

Appendix C: Informed Consent

Introduction:

My name is Guadalupe Cortez. I am a doctoral student at Kansas State University. I am conducting a research study to understand the perceptions of new principals who participated in the new Principal Induction program during the 2023-2024 school year. The goal of this study is to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the new Principal Induction program. This research is part of my doctoral degree, and I invite you to participate.

Process:

If you choose to participate in this research, you will be asked to:

1. Participate in a video Zoom interview with me, which may last about 60 minutes, depending on the direction of our conversation.
2. Answer questions I have prepared to gain insight into your thoughts and perceptions on how to enhance the new Principal Induction Program.
3. Allow me to video record our session. I will be the only person analyzing the recording, and no one else be present in our session. If you wish to review the recording, you may do so at the end of our session.

Eligibility:

You are eligible to participate in this research if:

1. You participated in the New Principal Induction Program.
2. You are a principal in a culturally diverse campus
3. You remained in the same urban school district for your second year of Principalship

I would like to include a minimum of 8 participants in this research.

Risks:

There are minimal risks associated with this study. Some potential risks include discomfort due to the fact that I am a Principal supervisor. It should, however, be noted that I will not be interviewing any principal I directly supervise. The only professional relationship with the participants is that I am a colleague to your principal supervisor. Also, there may be some discomfort from the types of questions asked during the interview, such as sharing your thoughts on improvements of the content or presentations shared during the new principal induction

program. To minimize these risks, you can stop participating at any time or choose not to answer any interview question.

Benefits:

If you decide to participate in this research study, there will not be any direct benefits to you. However, your contribution to this research study could benefit other new Principals. The findings of this study will guide future decisions as this urban school district reassesses whether to continue supporting the implementation of the New Principal Induction Program for future new principals.

Confidentiality:

The information you provide will be kept confidential at all times. To protect your identity, I will use a pseudonym to identify you. The responses will not be linked to your pseudonym. Access to your information will be limited to myself, my dissertation chair, and my dissertation committee. The data collected will be shredded once it is no longer needed. The subject's information collected as part of the research, even if identifiers are removed, will not be used or distributed for future research studies.

Contact Information:

If you have questions for me, you can contact me at: 817-675-9154 or email me at gcortez@ksu.edu, the principal investigator Dr. Shabina Kavimandan, assistant professor, 785-317-8800, shabina@k-state.edu or the IRB chair Dr. Lisa Rubin, IRB Chair, 785-532-3224, rubin@ksu.edu

Zoom recording and transcription:

I would like to use the Zoom recording to record your responses. You can still participate if you do not wish to be recorded. I will also be utilizing the Zoom Transcription. I will be the only one viewing the transcription, unless you would like to review your responses.

Please “sign” the electronic document agreeing to the recording.

Voluntary Participation:

Your participation is voluntary. If you decide not to continue your participation, please let me know. You can withdraw without penalty or loss of benefit.

Signature:

By signing this electronic consent form, you acknowledge your understanding of its' contents. If you are willing to participate, please contact the student researcher by responding to the email

address provided in the invitation. You will be asked to provide your consent by electronically signing the form. By replying to the email, you agree to participate. After providing your electronic consent, you may print or save a copy of the consent form for your records.

Participant Signature	Printed Name	Date
Researcher Signature	Printed Name	Date

Appendix D: Excel Coding Framework

Theoretical Alignment	Main Themes	Definition	Subcodes	Examples from Participant Data
Transformational Leadership	Relational Networks as Transformational Leadership Catalyst	Peer cohort relationships and authentic supervisory support emerged as vital elements enabling successful leadership development during the first-year principalship.	Peer cohort connections; monthly academy meetings; relationship building activities	Group chats for support (8/8 participants); "learning who's in the room" connections
Distributive Leadership	Collaborative Problem-Solving Networks	Shared leadership responsibilities through peer collaboration became critical in navigating first-year challenges and decision-making processes.	Informal communication channels; collaborative sharing of district-level responsibility structures	Text threads for questions; peer networks filling formal support gaps; "we're all going through the same thing"
Theory of Change in Education	Systemic Knowledge Transfer in Need of Comprehensive Redesign	Significant gaps between preparation programs and operational realities hindered principals' ability to implement effective change strategies.	Budget management deficits; technology system navigation; district-specific procedures	Budget identified as #1 challenge (7/8 participants); Kronos system complexity; hiring process difficulties
Instructional Leadership	Sequential Professional Learning Structure	Structured, monthly learning sessions supported principals' capacity building and practical application of leadership strategies.	Monthly Academy sessions; professional development; strategic implementation	Sequential topic delivery; practical application focus; "pacing was hands down spot on"

Culturally Responsive Leadership	Cultural Leadership Development in Need of Contextualized Support	How principals leading diverse, high-poverty, and turnaround schools required differentiated support addressing specific contextual challenges.	Turnaround school challenges; emergent bilingual support; equity-focused practices	96% high poverty schools; 80% Hispanic populations; "my school is the turnaround school the same"
Transformational Leadership	Trust Building in High-Turnover Environments	Principals needed to establish credibility and stability in contexts of frequent leadership changes, requiring sustained relationship-building efforts.	Trust-building strategies; credibility establishment; culture development	"7 principals in 9 years"; "they didn't know if they could trust me"; building stable culture
Theory of Change in Education	Organizational Change Management in Need of Structured Scaffolding	Overwhelming complexity when implementing change initiatives required clear prioritization frameworks and sequential support structures.	Information overload; priority identification; role transition complexity	"Whole pie" vs. "piece of pie" realization; hidden principal responsibilities; systems management overwhelm
Transformational Leadership	Executive Director Mentorship Impact	Authentic, accessible supervisory leadership was a key to the transformational leadership model through individualized consideration and coaching approaches.	Individual coaching support; accessibility; feedback provision	24/7 accessibility; "collaborative and supportive"; coaching and feedback focus
Instructional Leadership	Instructional vs. Operational Priority Balance	How tension between immediate operational needs and long-term instructional leadership development creates a struggle in	Behavioral management demands; operational vs. instructional balance; classroom visitation challenges	"Dealing with behaviors and not getting into classrooms"; operational demands competing with instruction

		maintaining instructional focus.		
Transformational Leadership	Authentic Vulnerability as Leadership Strength Development	Embracing "not knowing" and modeling growth mindset became powerful leadership tools fostering authentic relationships and continuous learning cultures.	Growth mindset modeling; vulnerability in leadership; authentic relationship building	"I don't know" as leadership strength (5/8 participants); genuine self-expression; coaching mindset
Instructional Leadership	Operational Excellence as Foundation for Instructional Leadership	Mastering operational systems and building organizational stability served as prerequisites for effective instructional leadership enabling sustained teaching focus.	Behavioral management systems; budget mastery; compliance procedures	Behavior control before instruction; operational anxiety removal (6/8 participants); systems mastery necessity
Theory of Change	Resource Misalignment and Support System Gaps	How disconnects between available district resources and actual principal needs highlighted systemic and programmatic approaches to targeted support delivery.	Generic vs. targeted support; resource allocation inefficiencies; departmental coordination gaps	Inconsistent academic support; "two different people told me different things about departmental misalignment"

Appendix E: Agendas



STRATEGIC GOALS:
1 - Increase Student Achievement
2 - Improve Operational Effectiveness and Efficiency
3 - Enhance Family and Community Engagement
4 - Develop a Workforce that is Student Customer

Location: Teaching and Learning Rm. 11

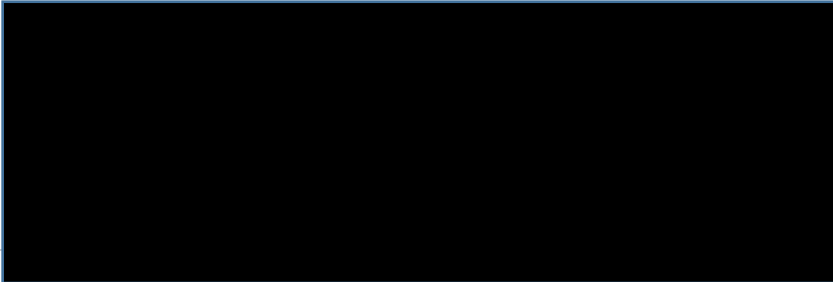
Centered

Note Taker:
Time Keeper:

New Principals: Thursday, May 2

8:00 a.m.-11:15 p.m.

TIME	SESSION	PRESENTER	STRATEGIC GOAL(S)	RESOURCES & Links	ACTION COMMUNICATION REQUIRED		
8:00-8:30 a.m.	Welcome Reflection		1,2,3,4	New Principal's Mtg May 2, 2024.pptx			
8:30-11:30 a.m.	CIP Refresh			Commitment Statement			
11:30-11:45 a.m.	Reflection/Survey			survey			



STRATEGIC GOALS:
1 - Increase Student Achievement
2 - Improve Operational Effectiveness and Efficiency
3 - Enhance Family and Community Engagement
4 - Develop a Workforce that is Student Customer

Location: Teaching and Learning Rm. 11

Centered

Note Taker:
Time Keeper:

New Principals: Thursday, February 1

8:00 a.m.-11:15 p.m.

TIME	SESSION	PRESENTER	STRATEGIC GOAL(S)	RESOURCES & Links	ACTION COMMUNICATION REQUIRED		
8:30-8:45a.m.	Welcome Message		1,2,3,4				
8:45-9:45 a.m.	Procurement		1,2,4	Fort Worth ISD Procurement Services Overview.pptx			
9:45-10:00 a.m.	Break						
10:00-11:00 p.m.	Title 1 Guidelines						
11:00-11:15 p.m.	Reflection/Survey		4	https://forms.gle/NZV4qt48jcgayYGba			

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STRATEGIC GOALS:
1 - Increase Student Achievement
2 - Improve Operational Effectiveness and Efficiency
3 - Enhance Family and Community Engagement
4 - Develop a Workforce that is Student Customer Centered

Location: Teaching and Learning Rm. 11

Note Taker:
Time Keeper:

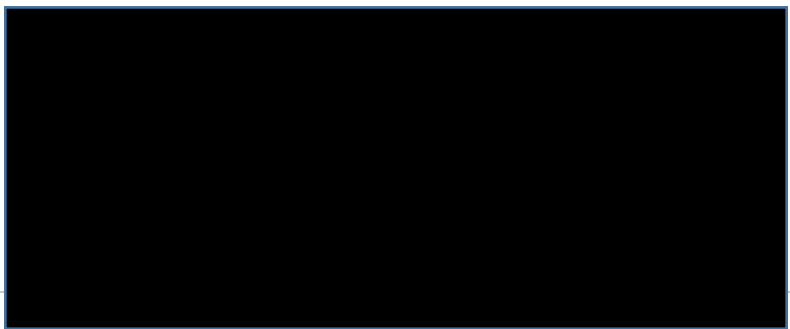


New Principals: Thursday, Oct. 19

8:00 a.m. -12:30 p.m.

TIME	SESSION	PRESENTER	STRATEGIC GOAL(S)	RESOURCES & Links	ACTION COMMUNICATION REQUIRED		
8:00-8:15 a.m.	Welcome Message	[REDACTED]	1,2,3,4	Presentation			
8:15-9:00 a.m.	Safety and Security	[REDACTED]	1,2,4	Admin security update 101923.pptx			
9:00-10:30 a.m.	Local 199 Budget	[REDACTED]	1,2,3	Principal Academy Budget.pptx			
10:30-12:30 p.m.	Special Budget Codes and 211	[REDACTED]	1,2,3	Copy of Title StateComp QuickGuide Rev 2023.pptx New Principal Academy Agenda			

				final (1).docx			
12:30-12:35 p.m.	Reflection/Survey	[REDACTED]	4	Survey Link 			



STRATEGIC GOALS:
1 - Increase Student Achievement
2 - Improve Operational Effectiveness and Efficiency
3 - Enhance Family and Community Engagement
4 - Develop a Workforce that is Student-Centered

Location: Teaching and Learning Rm. 2

Efficiency

Note Taker:
Time Keeper:



Principal: Thursday, December 7

TIME	SESSION	PRESENTATION	STRATEGIC GOAL(S)	RESOURCES & Links	ACTION COMMUNICATION REQUIRED	DUE DATE	NOTES
8:00-8:15 a.m.	Welcome		1,2,3,4	Slide Deck			
8:15-8:45 a.m.	Believe		1,2,3,4	Slide Deck			
8:45-9:45 a.m.	Documentation		4	Slide Deck			
Break 9:45 a.m. - 10:00 p.m.							
10:00-11:00 a.m.	Problem of Practice		1,2,3,4				

11:00-11:15 a.m.	Wrap-up/Survey						
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STRATEGIC GOALS:
1 - Increase Student Achievement
2 - Improve Operational Effectiveness and Efficiency
3 - Enhance Family and Community Engagement
4 - Develop a Workforce that is Student & Customer-Centered

Appendix F: Coding Continued

Appendix F is a continuation of Appendix D. The justification for the expressed themes are as follows:

- Thematic analysis and coding structure → Braun & Clarke (2006)
- Interpretative qualitative coding foundations → Bhattacharya (2017)
- Theoretical lenses shaping coding categories → Bass (1985); Burns (1978); Gay (2022); Gooden et al. (2023); Meyer-Looze et al. (2023)

Code	Definition	Example Quote	Axial Category	Final Theme
Lack of clarity in expectations	Statements describing confusion about operational procedures, decision-making authority, or role responsibilities.	“I never knew who to ask for operational decisions.”	Organizational barriers	Walls in knowledge transfer
Isolation in role	Expressions of feeling unsupported, alone, or disconnected from district leadership.	“It felt like I was on an island with no one to turn to.”	Relational disconnection	Relational networks and support ecosystems
Inconsistent communication	Reports of unclear, delayed, or contradictory information from district or supervisors.	“I would get three different answers depending on who I talked to.”	Communication breakdowns	Walls in knowledge transfer
Value of mentorship	Comments highlighting the importance of mentor feedback,	“My mentor was the only person who really helped	Professional guidance	Relational networks and support ecosystems

	guidance, or modeling.	me make sense of things.”		
Overwhelming operational tasks	References to difficulty balancing managerial duties with instructional leadership demands.	“I spent so much time just putting out fires that I couldn’t get to instruction.”	Operational overload	Barriers to instructional leadership
Need for culturally responsive support	Statements identifying a need for training or guidance related to diverse student populations.	“My campus demographics were nothing like what I was prepared for.”	Equity and diversity challenges	Supporting culturally diverse school communities
Misalignment between induction and real needs	Comments indicating that induction content did not match practical challenges on campus.	“The induction sessions didn’t address half of the issues I was actually facing.”	Programmatic gaps	Disconnect between induction design and principal needs
Reliance on peer networks	Descriptions of informal principal groups providing support not available through formal structures.	“Other principals became my lifeline. We figured things out together.”	Peer collaboration	Relational networks and support ecosystems
Difficulty accessing district resources	Challenges locating, requesting, or utilizing district-provided tools, personnel, or guidance.	“Half the time I didn’t even know these resources existed.”	Resource navigation obstacles	Walls in knowledge transfer
Desire for more structured guidance	Expressed need for clearer frameworks, protocols, or	“I just needed someone to show me what the first 90	Structural support needs	Barriers to instructional leadership

	support structures for new principals.	days should look like.”		
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Appendix G: Participant District Provided Survey Responses

July 20,2023 Principal Onboarding Feedback (District provided survey responses)

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P
1	Timestamp	First and Last Name	Number	Pyramid	relevance of each	relevance of each	relevance of each	relevance of each	relevance of each	relevance of each	relevance of each	takeaways you will	you still have?	relevance of each	takeaways you will	you still have?
2	7/20/2023 14:13:59				Very Relevant	Very Relevant	Relevant	Very Relevant	Relevant	Very Relevant	Very Relevant	and leveraging	development.	Very Relevant	and eating lunch with	
3	7/20/2023 16:36:45				Very Relevant	Very Relevant	Very Relevant	Very Relevant	Very Relevant	Very Relevant	Very Relevant	and using them for		Very Relevant		
4	7/20/2023 16:37:16				Very Relevant	Very Relevant	Very Relevant	Very Relevant	Very Relevant	Very Relevant	Very Relevant	contacts and work on	All things budget	Very Relevant	had one share	
5	7/20/2023 16:37:52				Relevant	Relevant	Relevant	Relevant	Relevant	Relevant	Relevant	CIP and Leading	know there is a	Very Relevant	campus and the	None
6	7/20/2023 16:39:34				Very Relevant	Very Relevant	Very Relevant	Very Relevant	Very Relevant	Very Relevant	Very Relevant	focus areas this year	see a model of an	Very Relevant	building	home/wo
7	7/20/2023 16:40:03				Very Relevant	Very Relevant	Very Relevant	Very Relevant	Very Relevant	Very Relevant	Very Relevant	CIP and calendaring	opportunities	Very Relevant	best you can	NA
8	7/20/2023 16:40:05				Very Relevant	Very Relevant	Very Relevant	Very Relevant	Very Relevant	Very Relevant	Relevant	is accessing the	about the other	Relevant	for starting the year.	No
9	7/20/2023 16:40:37				Very Relevant	Very Relevant	Very Relevant	Very Relevant	Very Relevant	Very Relevant	Not Relevant	Improvement Plan	need to be set up	Very Relevant	work life balance.	everyone
10	7/20/2023 16:40:41				Very Relevant	Very Relevant	Very Relevant	Very Relevant	Very Relevant	Very Relevant	Very Relevant	identified from the	N/A	Very Relevant	Most important role	None
11	7/20/2023 16:43:14				Very Relevant	Very Relevant	Very Relevant	Very Relevant	Very Relevant	Very Relevant	Very Relevant	alone and I can ask	wonderings at the	Very Relevant	expectations.	N/A
12	7/20/2023 16:45:50				Very Relevant	Very Relevant	Very Relevant	Very Relevant	Very Relevant	Very Relevant	Not Relevant	cohort will meet	what I do not know :)	Very Relevant	to do for our campus	
13																

Copy of July 20,2023 Principal Onboarding Feedback (District provided survey responses)

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P
1	Timestamp	First and Last Name	Number	Pyramid	relevance of each	relevance of each	relevance of each	relevance of each	relevance of each	relevance of each	relevance of each	takeaways you will	you still have?	relevance of each	takeaways you will	you still have?
2	7/20/2023 14:13:59				Very Relevant	Very Relevant	Relevant	Very Relevant	Relevant	Very Relevant	Very Relevant	and leveraging	development.	Very Relevant	and eating lunch	
3	7/20/2023 16:36:45				Very Relevant	Very Relevant	Very Relevant	Very Relevant	Very Relevant	Very Relevant	Very Relevant	and using them for		Very Relevant		
4	7/20/2023 16:37:16				Very Relevant	Very Relevant	Very Relevant	Very Relevant	Very Relevant	Very Relevant	Very Relevant	contacts and work	All things budget	Very Relevant	had one share	
5	7/20/2023 16:37:52				Relevant	Relevant	Relevant	Relevant	Relevant	Relevant	Relevant	CIP and Leading	know there is a	Very Relevant	campus and the	None
6	7/20/2023 16:39:34				Very Relevant	Very Relevant	Very Relevant	Very Relevant	Very Relevant	Very Relevant	Very Relevant	focus areas this year	see a model of an	Very Relevant	building	home/work life
7	7/20/2023 16:40:03				Very Relevant	Very Relevant	Very Relevant	Very Relevant	Very Relevant	Very Relevant	Very Relevant	CIP and calendaring	opportunities	Very Relevant	best you can	NA
8	7/20/2023 16:40:05				Very Relevant	Very Relevant	Very Relevant	Very Relevant	Very Relevant	Very Relevant	Relevant	is accessing the	about the other	Relevant	for starting the year.	No
9	7/20/2023 16:40:37				Very Relevant	Very Relevant	Very Relevant	Very Relevant	Very Relevant	Very Relevant	Not Relevant	Improvement Plan	need to be set up	Very Relevant	work life balance.	everyone is abl
10	7/20/2023 16:40:41				Very Relevant	Very Relevant	Very Relevant	Very Relevant	Very Relevant	Very Relevant	Very Relevant	identified from the	N/A	Very Relevant	Most important role	None
11	7/20/2023 16:43:14				Very Relevant	Very Relevant	Very Relevant	Very Relevant	Very Relevant	Very Relevant	Very Relevant	alone and I can ask	wonderings at the	Very Relevant	expectations.	N/A
12	7/20/2023 16:45:50				Very Relevant	Very Relevant	Very Relevant	Very Relevant	Very Relevant	Very Relevant	Not Relevant	cohort will meet	what I do not know :)	Very Relevant	to do for our campus	
13																
14																
15																
16																

May New Principal Academy (District provided survey responses)

Timestamp	Principal first and last name	This CNA/CIP session was beneficial	Overall-how beneficial was the New Principal / Which topics presented in the New Principals	Were there any topics that you did not find be Would you recomm
5/2/2024 11:40:27		Strongly Agree	Extremely beneficial	It was a great safe place for new principals to NA
5/2/2024 11:40:49		Strongly Agree	Extremely beneficial	Budget N/A
5/2/2024 11:40:52		Strongly Agree	Extremely beneficial	CIP/CNA
5/2/2024 11:41:16		Strongly Agree	Extremely beneficial	Budget N/A
5/2/2024 11:41:36		Strongly Agree	Extremely beneficial	Looking at our CIP and CNA. nope
5/2/2024 11:42:26		Strongly Agree	Beneficial	Information on budget & CIP. I found all topics beneficial.
5/2/2024 11:43:02		Strongly Agree	Extremely beneficial	CIP, Budgets, Grants, Systems and Processe NO.
5/2/2024 11:43:27		Strongly Agree	Extremely beneficial	Budget, CNA/CIP N/A
5/2/2024 11:43:53		Strongly Agree	Extremely beneficial	We were able to go through the CNA/CIP. n/a
5/2/2024 11:44:02		Strongly Agree	Extremely beneficial	All topics were beneficial. Finance, CIP/CNA, None. All was beneficial.
5/2/2024 11:47:42		Strongly Agree	Extremely beneficial	CIP, CNA, Budget No
5/2/2024 11:48:16		Strongly Agree	Beneficial	Budget, CIP/CNA N/A

New Principal Academy February (District provided survey responses)

	H	I	J	K	L	M
1	To what extent were the presentations benefici	To what extent were the presentations benefici	What was your big take away from today?	How will you make this professional developme	What further professional learning topics di	Any additional feedback, appreciation or comments you would like to sh
2						
3	Strongly Agree	Attention to detail is key. Ask questions! Be pr	Intentionally build my CNA and CIP so that my	Exemplars of CNA/CIP	Thank you for your commitment and support!	
4	Strongly Agree	Ask for help :)	CNA creation support			
5	Strongly Agree	Systems will get better in year 2!	I will ensure that I am pulling my budget week	I. don't know	This was great information and much needed.	
6	Strongly Agree	Lots of budget mysteries were cleared up	I am leaving with ideas for systems and plans	'letter writing, grievance process, accountability pieces		
7	Strongly Agree	Make sure budgeting is planned	Make sure we are planning next year's budget	More budgeting and spending	I feel like today was very beneficial	
8	Strongly Agree	Tying the spending for the campus to the Cam	I start with Campus Needs Assessment, which	Staffing when it comes to difficult situations	N/A	
9	Agree	We must adhere to the timelines and systems	Create a system to stay on top on my campus	I need training on systems for each of the c	I enjoyed today's training. The information was needed.	

October New Principal Academy (District provided survey responses)

	To what extent were the presentations benefici	To what extent were the presentations benefici	What was your big take away from today?	How will you make this professional developme	Any additional feedback, appreciation or comments you would like to sh
Strongly Agree	Strongly Agree	Intentionality with budget and my secretary	Establish tighter systems with my secretary.		
Strongly Agree	Strongly Agree	Everything needs to be aligned for the bud	I can finally start using my funds :)	Today's information was extremely helpful, but also a LOT. Maybe chunk	
Strongly Agree	Strongly Agree	I feel like I now have a better vision of the b	Budgeting		
Strongly Agree	Strongly Agree	Budget!	The walkthrough will help me spend my money quicker!		
Strongly Agree	Strongly Agree	My biggest takeaway is how to navigate thr	I will provide alignment between student needs to services and instructional supports for our students.		
Strongly Agree	Strongly Agree	Everything	To properly plan for safety and security and p	It was a lot but extremely beneficial. Further topics would be roles and re	
Strongly Agree	Strongly Agree	I enjoyed learning about the budgets and w	I will go back to campus, meet with my secre	Thank you for taking time to put together relevant information for us. It w	
Strongly Agree	Strongly Agree	Making sure that I create system to monitor	Meeting with my Admin team to ensure that	ou This was an excellent training and I really appreciated. It was extremely	
Agree	Agree	Making sure that I am monitoring budgets w	I will meet with my leadership team to make	sure we are on one accord based on the information that was presented to	
Strongly Agree	Strongly Agree	To ensure that I create a system and proce	I will meet with my admin team to ensure	that v Thank you so much for putting this training together it has been helpful	
Agree	Agree	The knowledge about budgets will get easie	I will meet with my Admin. Asst. to ensure	that she is following the protocols when it comes to spending our school mon	
Strongly Agree	Strongly Agree	Pacing when it comes to spending and und	Make sure we are in compliance with spending	and meeting the needs of students with purchases.	

Appendix H: Meet & Greet - Principals 2023 - 2024 School Year

Principal Placements – Meet & Greet Protocol

Initial Notification

Principal Supervisor Actions

The Principal Supervisor will meet with the sitting principal to share information about the incoming campus leader. This meeting will occur privately in the days prior to the first meeting of the incoming & outgoing principals.

The First Meeting

Principal Supervisor Actions

The Principal Supervisor will arrange a time for the incoming and outgoing principal to meet in person prior to the staff introductions. This can occur at the campus or a neutral site selected by the principal supervisor. Topics of discussion can include a “state of the campus” discussion as well of a review of instructional priorities and operational topics. A formal transition meeting with an extended agenda will occur just prior to the official transfer of responsibility.

Staff Introductions – Meet and Greet Event

Principal Supervisor Actions

The Principal Supervisor will coordinate a time for the incoming and outgoing principal to meet in person with the campus staff. They will attend the event and assist with the introduction of the incoming leader.

Outgoing Principal Actions

Prior to the event, the outgoing leader will send an invitation for campus staff to participate in a Meet and Greet event with the incoming leader. This invitation will include the name and brief background information composed by the incoming leader.

At the event, the outgoing leader will provide an opening statement and introduce the Principal supervisor as well as the incoming campus principal to the staff.

Incoming Principal Actions

Prior to the event, the incoming leader will provide a brief background statement to be shared with campus staff in the Meet and Greet invitation.

At the event, the incoming leader will share information regarding educational background, prior experience, and why they are excited to become a part of the new campus team. This is a loosely structured event, with time for light questions and answers as well as come and go casual conversation.

Community Notification

Incoming Principal Actions

The incoming leader will compose a welcome letter to the campus community that includes information regarding educational background, prior experience, and why they are excited to become a part of the new campus team. This letter will then be sent to the outgoing leader for dissemination.

Outgoing Principal Actions

The outgoing leader will compose an introductory message to the campus community that includes a personal farewell and information regarding the transition of responsibility at the campus. A copy of the incoming leader's welcome message will be shared at the same time as an attachment or inserted text. This joint communication is to be broadcast in multiple ways such as in hard copy flyers sent home with students, on the campus website, via Parent Link, and across social media channels.

Appendix I: Budget Training Materials



BILINGUAL/ESL

Allowable/Unallowable Uses of Funding

In order to utilize campus PIC 25 Funds, the following guidelines must be observed:

- Elementary campus funds must be used specifically for Bilingual and/or ESL teachers.
- Secondary campus funds must be used specifically for students coded as EL and long-term EL. High School expenditures must originate from the campus LPAC/Lead Teacher, etc.
- Any items requested will require approval from the Bilingual/ESL department before funds will be approved.
- Other items needed that are not included in the list below will need prior approval from the Bilingual/ESL department before requests are made.

THE FOLLOWING ITEMS MAY BE PURCHASED WITH PIC25 FUNDS AND ARE DIRECTLY ATTRIBUTABLE TO BILINGUAL EDUCATION:

- | | |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• High interest books• High interest posters• Magnets for word walls• Computers and headphones (for online assessment and EL-specific instruction)• Software licenses• Technology and manipulatives directly related to the enhancement of instruction for English learners - Smart Boards, software• ELPS Training• LPAC Training• Travel to state conferences related to bilingual and ESL programs• Enhance Parent Resource Centers for ELL Parent/Student involvement activities• Conferences above and beyond general education conferences• Salaries for bilingual/ESL paraprofessionals | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Salaries for instructional coaches (targeted to bilingual/ESL teachers)• Consulting fees for professional development for bilingual/ESL teachers• Substitute pay for teachers absent to take bilingual/ESL certification tests• Bilingual dictionaries and thesauruses• Supplemental classroom materials aligned to TEKS in English and Spanish• Printing costs for additional bilingual/ESL materials required for quality instruction• Other supplies required for quality instruction for ELs• Smaller class size• Consulting fees for experts in dual language/ESL program implementation• Healthy snacks for parents of ELs participating in Bilingual/ESL events |
|---|---|

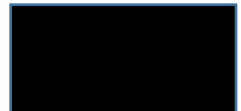
1

*Please note: These lists are not exhaustive and are subject to change without notice.
PIC25 Allowable/Unallowable Uses of Funding | Revised December 2019



THE FOLLOWING ITEMS MAY NOT BE PURCHASED WITH PIC21 FUNDS:

- | | |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Bilingual and ESL teachers and intervention specialists• Supplemental materials, equipment and supplies not specifically/ originally designed to support English Learners• Foreign language courses (PIC 11) | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Software to teach a foreign language• Salaries for bilingual administrators and coordinators• Interpreter services• Travel expenses for national conferences• Costs related to DAEP |
|--|---|



G/T Program Intent Code 21

GIFTED AND TALENTED

Allowable/Unallowable Uses of Funding

In order to utilize campus PIC21 Funds, the following guidelines must be observed:

- Elementary campus funds must be used **specifically** for and/or by the Gifted and Talented (G/T) Pullout Teacher.
- Secondary campus funds must be used **specifically** for students coded as G/T. High School expenditures must originate from the campus CCR Coordinators.
- Any items requested will require approval from the G/T department before funds will be approved.
- Other items needed that are not included in the list below will need prior approval from the G/T department before requests are made.

THE FOLLOWING ITEMS MAY BE PURCHASED WITH PIC21 FUNDS:

- | | | | |
|--|----------------------|---------------------|-----------------|
| • Binders | • Construction Paper | • Hot Glue Sticks | • Pipe Cleaners |
| • Books | • Copy Paper | • Markers | • Poster Board |
| • Card Stock | • Crayons | • Notebooks | • Post-It Notes |
| • Chart Paper | • Erasers | • Oil Pastels | • Printers |
| • Chenille Sticks | • Field Trips | • Paint | • Scissors |
| • Chromebooks | • Folders | • Paint Brushes | • Staplers |
| • Coding Robots
(Sphero, Ozobot,
etc.) | • Glue | • Paper Goods | • Staples |
| • Colored Pencils | • Glue Sticks | • Pencil Sharpeners | • Tape |
| | • Highlighters | • Pencils | • Toner |
| | • Hot Glue Guns | • Pens | • Yarn |

THE FOLLOWING ITEMS MAY NOT BE PURCHASED WITH PIC21 FUNDS:

- | | | | |
|--|-------------------------------------|-------------------|---------------------|
| • Food | • Advertising or
Marketing Costs | • Furniture | • Clothing |
| • Incentives (student,
teacher, parent) | • Facilities Costs or
Rentals | • Amusement Parks | • Cleaning Supplies |
| • Travel | | • Bounce Houses | |
| | | • Carnivals | |

Special Education PIC 23



SPECIAL EDUCATION

Allowable/Unallowable Uses of Funding

In order to utilize campus PIC 23 Funds, the following guidelines must be observed:

- Elementary campus funds must be used **specifically** for Special Education students.
- Secondary campus funds must be used **specifically** for students coded as Special Education.
- Any items requested will require approval from the Special Education department before funds will be approved.
- Other items needed that are not included in the list below will need prior approval from the Special Education department before requests are made.

THE FOLLOWING ITEMS MAY BE PURCHASED WITH PIC23 FUNDS:

- | | | | |
|--|----------------------|---------------------|-----------------|
| • Binders | • Construction Paper | • Markers | • Poster Board |
| • Books | • Copy Paper | • Notebooks | • Post-It Notes |
| • Card Stock | • Crayons | • Oil Pastels | • Printers |
| • Chart Paper | • Erasers | • Paint | • Scissors |
| • Chenille Sticks | • Folders | • Paint Brushes | • Staplers |
| • Chromebooks | • Glue | • Paper Goods | • Staples |
| • Coding Robots
(Sphero, Ozobot,
etc.) | • Glue Sticks | • Pencil Sharpeners | • Tape |
| • Colored Pencils | • Highlighters | • Pencils | • Toner |
| | • Hot Glue Guns | • Pens | • Yarn |
| | • Hot Glue Sticks | • Pipe Cleaners | |

THE FOLLOWING ITEMS MAY NOT BE PURCHASED WITH PIC23 FUNDS:

- | | | | |
|--|-------------------------------------|-------------------|---------------------|
| • Food | • Advertising or
Marketing Costs | • Furniture | • Clothing |
| • Incentives (student,
teacher, parent) | • Facilities Costs or
Rentals | • Amusement Parks | • Cleaning Supplies |
| • Travel | | • Bounce Houses | |
| | | • Carnivals | |

Appendix J: Copy of NPA 23-24 Planning (District SWOT Analysis Document)

LUDD Strategic Goals

- 1 - Increase Student Achievement
- 2 - Improve Operational Effectiveness and Efficiency
- 3 - Enhance Family and Community Engagement
- 4 - Develop a Workforce that is Student & Customer-Centered

LUDD Board Goals

1. Early Literacy
2. Early Math
3. College, Career, & Military Readiness
4. Learning Environment



LUDD SWOT Analysis-Although the analysis was reviewed as part of this study, the direct link is not provided to preserve the anonymity of the district.

Appendix K: Document Analysis Coding Table

Document Type	Document Analyzed	Primary Codes	Secondary Codes	Theme Alignment
Induction Agendas	October 2023 Agenda	Content delivery focus; Time allocation; Safety/budget emphasis	No relationship-building; 90-min budget session; Technical topics only	Theme 1: Relational Networks; Theme 2: Knowledge Transfer
Evidence Type	Gap Identified	Participant Validation	Theoretical Connection	Key Finding
Contradiction	Peer collaboration not structured despite participant value	District Provided Survey: "keeping cohort together enabled us"; Interview: organic text threads	Transformational Leadership (Bass, 1985)	Relational infrastructure emerged despite, not because of, program design
Document Type	Document Analyzed	Primary Codes	Secondary Codes	Theme Alignment
Induction Agendas	February 2024 Agenda	Procurement focus; Title I guidelines; Technical content	Late-cycle operational training; No instructional leadership	Theme 2: Knowledge Transfer; Sub-Theme 2: Operational Excellence
Evidence Type	Gap Identified	Participant Validation	Theoretical Connection	Key Finding
Contextualization	Training delayed until principals already	District Provided Survey: "I am leaving with ideas for next	Theory of Change (Meyer-Looze et al., 2023)	Timing misalignment contradicted

	navigated independently	year"; Interview: "not prepared for whole pie"		sequential learning principles
Document Type	Document Analyzed	Primary Codes	Secondary Codes	Theme Alignment
Induction Agendas	May 2024 Agenda	CIP Refresh session; End-of-year focus	Instructional planning in month 8; Operational priority maintained	Sub-Theme 2: Operational Excellence; Theme 4: Change Management
Evidence Type	Gap Identified	Participant Validation	Theoretical Connection	Key Finding
Corroboration	Instructional leadership delayed 8 months into tenure	District Provided Survey: requesting "instructional practices and coaching"; Interview: consumed by operations	Instructional Leadership (Hallinger & Heck, 2010)	Sequential pattern: operational mastery preceded instructional focus
Document Type	Document Analyzed	Primary Codes	Secondary Codes	Theme Alignment
Induction Agendas	All Four Agendas (Aggregate)	Universal programming; No differentiation; Generic content	Turnaround contexts ignored; Cultural responsiveness absent	Theme 3: Context-Specific Support
Evidence Type	Gap Identified	Participant Validation	Theoretical Connection	Key Finding

Contradiction	No specialized tracks despite 100% high-need placement	Interview: "turnaround schools need different session"; District Provided Survey: individual adaptation evident	Culturally Responsive Leadership (Gooden et al., 2023)	Program assumed principal universality despite principal particularity
Document Type	Document Analyzed	Primary Codes	Secondary Codes	Theme Alignment
Protocol Documents	Meet & Greet Protocol	Campus entry procedures; Staff introductions; Community notification	Peer network building absent; No principal-to-principal connection	Theme 1: Relational Networks
Evidence Type	Gap Identified	Participant Validation	Theoretical Connection	Key Finding
Corroboration	Protocol focused outward (campus) not inward (cohort)	Interview: "learning who's in the room"; District Provided Survey: "unofficial text thread"	Distributive Leadership (Spillane & Lee, 2014)	Formal structures omitted peer infrastructure participants valued most
Document Type	Document Analyzed	Primary Codes	Secondary Codes	Theme Alignment
Protocol Documents	Onboarding Checklist	47 undifferentiated tasks; 30-60-90 plan directive; Multiple simultaneous demands	No prioritization framework; No sequential staging	Theme 4: Change Management Scaffolding
Evidence Type	Gap Identified	Participant Validation	Theoretical Connection	Key Finding

Corroboration	Comprehensive scope without implementation guidance	Interview: "what needed done right now?"; District Provided Survey: "overwhelmed by information"	Theory of Change (Reinholz & Andrews, 2020)	Checklist documented overwhelming complexity without scaffolding
Document Type	Document Analyzed	Primary Codes	Secondary Codes	Theme Alignment
Operational Materials	PIC Fund Guidelines (21, 23, 25)	Allowable/unallowable items; Compliance lists; Categorical restrictions	No integration with CIP; No contextual application examples	Theme 2: Knowledge Transfer
Evidence Type	Gap Identified	Participant Validation	Theoretical Connection	Key Finding
Contextualization	Procedural rules without campus-level application support	Interview: "didn't know to ask until something required it"; District Provided Survey: "learning district way on fly"	Instructional Leadership	Reactive rather than proactive knowledge transfer pattern
Document Type	Document Analyzed	Primary Codes	Secondary Codes	Theme Alignment
District Climate Data	SWOT Analysis (May 2023)	"Departments in silos"; "Initiatives—quantity over quality"; Staff dedication strength	Identified "bilingual support" and "special ed" as weaknesses	Theme 3: Context-Specific Support; All themes
Evidence Type	Gap Identified	Participant Validation	Theoretical Connection	Key Finding

Contextualization	District recognized problems but didn't address in induction	Interview: fragmented support experiences; District Provided Survey: requesting culturally diverse collaboration	Organizational Change Theory	Awareness-to-action gap: documented concerns not operationalized
Document Type	Document Analyzed	Primary Codes	Secondary Codes	Theme Alignment
District-Provided Post-Session Survey Data	October 2023 District Provided Survey Responses	Budget rated "extremely beneficial"; Requests for "more time" and "chunked delivery"	Real-time feedback; Operational anxiety evident	Theme 2: Knowledge Transfer; Sub-Theme 2: Operational Excellence
Evidence Type	Gap Identified	Participant Validation	Theoretical Connection	Key Finding
Corroboration	Content valued but delivery insufficient	Interview: budget as #1 challenge; Survey: "a LOT... need process time"	Adult Learning Theory	Temporal triangulation: live feedback matched retrospective accounts
Document Type	Document Analyzed	Primary Codes	Secondary Codes	Theme Alignment
District-Provided Post-Session Survey Data	May 2024 District Provided Survey Responses	Cohort value ("like-minded people"); Requests for earlier CIP/operations training; 100% satisfaction ratings	Timing critiques; Relationship emphasis; Content gaps noted	All Themes

Evidence Type	Gap Identified	Participant Validation	Theoretical Connection	Key Finding
Corroboration & Contradiction	High satisfaction despite significant gaps	Interview: year-end reflections validated; District Provided Survey: simultaneous praise and improvement requests	Transformational Leadership	Paradox: effective relationships masked ineffective programming