

Retaining Teachers: Intentional Invitational Action and Social Justice Leadership as Driving Forces

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ABSTRACT

Social justice challenges and teacher retention challenges create crises in urban school districts across the United States. Moreover, despite literature linking principal leadership with school ethos known is little as to how the use of an invitational leadership style with a social justice orientation has a connection to the retention of teachers in urban settings. This study used a qualitative case study survey design conducted at two urban school district settings, one in the Western United States and the other in the Midwest. The analysis found a connection between the principal using an invitational leadership style, and the presence of a strong social orientation that helped to retain teachers. These findings present implications for scholars and practitioners.

Keywords: Invitational Leadership; Social Justice; Retention of Teachers.

INTRODUCTION

In 2015, two reports emerged regarding the supply and demand of educators entering and staying in the teaching profession noting dismal outcomes for these answers of teacher retention [1]. While their research added to a heavily researched topic searching for these answers of teacher shortage, recruitment and retention [2], these studies offered a one-stop, cumulative, extensive resource. Podolsky et al., [3] argued attrition was most significant in high poverty schools due to lower salaries and impoverished working conditions. Additionally, Sutchter et al. (p. 51) [4] argued, "A comprehensive research review of attrition in high-poverty schools finds that the most significant workplace conditions associated with teacher attrition are teachers' perceptions of their principal, collegial, and school culture." Buckingham and Goodall [5] echo this, when they found that teachers would come for the mission of a school, but stay for the team with whom they worked. They went on to note when teams share vision and values, they engage and accomplish at higher rates.

Unfortunately, the rate of principal turnover in high-poverty, high-minority, and high-need urban high schools is also significant [6]. In fact, by 2020 the demand for k-12 principals has increased by six percent nationwide due to population increases [7] and principal attrition.

This inquiry examined the connection of a leader's commitment at a high-poverty, high minority urban school to following the tenets of invitational leadership. Furthermore, this

examination attempted to reveal how that connection leads to a commitment from teachers, parents, outside stakeholders, and the principal to continue to engage in the development of students beyond the two-year tenure of many high needs schools [8]. There have been inquiries regarding the benefits of invitational leadership within high needs urban high schools [8], and examinations of what principals can do to attract and retain excellent educators in high needs urban schools [3]. Little has been studied on the connection between the retention of teachers in high poverty settings due to the tenets of invitational leadership, integrating the actions of a social justice leader being present through the principal's leadership. Specifically, the purpose of this paper is to discuss the connection between adherence of the school leader to the principles of invitational leadership theory, while integrating social justice in high poverty urban high schools and that demonstration of leadership behaviors to the connection to retention of teachers. Research questions that guided this investigation are: What tenets of invitational leadership and social justice orientation are evident within the leadership style of the principal? And, how do the tenets of the invitational leadership style with a social justice orientation of the principal impact the retention of teachers within a high poverty school setting?

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORKS

Intending to realize fully and provide the framework needed to understand the significance of this study, presented are two separate frameworks: social justice leadership [9] and invitational leadership [10]. Martin and Miller [8] recognized the connection between the two when one of the emerging themes in their work included, "Addressing Social Justice Inequities through the Six P's." The six P's is a reference to the six P's of invitational education [10]. Following their line of inquiry, this research will have a greater focus on the connection of sustained engagement through invitational leadership practices employed by the school principal. This focus on two high poverty, high minority, high needs urban high schools also invited the exploration into the principal's engagement in socially just leadership practices. Presented below are the two frameworks.

Social Justice Leadership

In much of the high poverty, high minority, urban high schools, the proportion of White females teaching Black, Latino, and Native American students has increased while Black and Latino students were primarily attending schools with only Black and Latino students has risen [11]. Therefore, teachers in these schools need leaders grounded in social justice, as defined by Theoharis [7]. The latter, "make issues of race, class, gender, disability, sexual orientation, and other historically and currently marginalizing conditions in the United States central to their advocacy, leadership, practice, and vision" (p. 223). Accordingly, the social justice theory will be an overarching theory further explored. Theoharis's [12] definition of social justice leadership "...is to mean that these principals advocate, lead, and keep at the center of their practice and vision issues of race, class, gender, disability, sexual orientation, and other historically and currently marginalized conditions in the United States" (p. 5)[12].

The conditions in highly segregated, high poverty schools led to teachers leaving the profession early or at least not staying multiple years [3]. With so much focus on this turnover of teachers, few had noticed that the principal turnover rate surpassing the teacher turnover rate [13]. Consequently, the turnover with a principal exacerbated the rate at which teachers left, creating a level of adult professional unrest that unsurprisingly coincided with student test scores falling

in a school [13]. Compile this with high poverty schools [3] it becomes vital that the school finds a leader who is willing to build a team where teachers will come for the mission while staying for the team [5].

Compared to other leadership theories, the social justice theory in educational leadership literature was comparatively new [14]. Bogatch [14] sought the creation of a comprehensive view of different perspectives, such as what social justice leadership should entail. He argued that the ongoing struggle for social justice in education has gone on for decades. He saw that in educational leadership, “an individually-minded principal is often called a maverick; an individually-minded teacher leader is called a trouble-maker. Neither are included under the banner of loyalty to the system” (p.6) [14]. He challenged educational leaders to create social and political space for social justice advocacy by arguing four parameters in the name of educational leadership. These parameters are:

1. There can be no fixed or predictable meanings of social justice before actually engaging in social and academic discourses;
2. The center or unity of any educational reform is so dynamic that it cannot hold together for long;
3. The result of our work (just and unjust) are always fragile and fleeting; and, therefore,
4. All social justice/educational reform efforts must be deliberately and continuously reinvented and critiqued – repeatedly. (p. 10) [14]

For Bogotch [14], one could not be challenged to be a real educational leader without advocating for social justice. “And at every step, articulate how our actions connect to social justice inside and outside of schools” (p.10).

Subsequently, Theoharis [11] conveyed the following leadership traits were evident in principals following the ethos of social justice leadership:

1. Arrogant humility: Leaders hold a headstrong belief that they are the right person to lead the team toward the vision of social justice for the students and families they serve while paradoxically being filled with self-doubt. They are humble enough to know after self-reflection when they need to admit when they are wrong. They wonder if they indeed are the right person for the role of principal.
2. Passionate visionary leadership: These social justice principals stand as transformational leaders who are driven by such deep care, commitment, and enthusiasm toward championing a strong vision. These components are realized by such a passion that there is a tightly interwoven connection between the principal position and the person doing that job.
3. Tenacious commitment to justice: The leader maintains a fierce and sustaining commitment to equity and justice not only for their staff but also for themselves. (p. 17)

These sentiments were further echoed when argued during a 2011 ruling by Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor when she stated, “Inequality in education is the most pressing issue in diversity in the United States” contributes to, “...make educational equity and diversity mainstream issues for practitioners, scholars, and policymakers to consider” (p. 247). Social justice leadership is an inclusive leadership that engages relationships not only in dialogical, collaborative, reciprocal, and horizontal ways; they also promote equity and justice through caring fluid relationships among various leaders [15].

Any principal in a high-poverty, high-minority, high-needs, and urban high school is taking on a role where persistent inequalities concerning distinguished groups, including among others race, sexual orientation, ethnicity, social class, and language of origin continue to exist [16]. Yet, the promising literature on social justice leadership lacked in specific skill sets employed by these leaders [17]. Therefore, within this inquiry, it was contented the social justice leader would be recognized as a maverick, while also needing many troublemakers as denoted by Bogatch [14]. Therefore, he or she must have taken an invitational posture to gain the vision, buy-in, and clear structure needed to retain teachers within the high-poverty, high-minority, high needs urban high school [18].

Invitational Leadership

Considering the desire for accessible actions, invitational leadership [10] became the primary theory used for this study. Invitational leadership affords a school leader an immediate structure to work through an inviting stance after which the actions taken affect the people, place, policies, programs, processes, and politics of the school building lead to an inviting environment [8]. If the schools are going to find success, teachers in high need, high poverty communities, must stay for at least five years.

The solutions offered to retain teachers in high needs schools include culture, structures for leadership opportunities, collegial support, and the chance to shape and influence within the school [20]. This, coupled with working conditions cited by Podolsky et al. [3], included school leadership, professional collaboration, and shared decision-making, accountability systems, and resources for teaching and learning [3]. Addressing all these variables was the framework of invitational leadership [10].

Being an invitational leader encompasses all aspects of one's life as the leader calls forth all around them to pursue a life of purpose when they "invite their colleagues, family, friends, loved ones, and community to do the same" [10]. A school's climate contributes to psychological well-being, student achievement, positive youth development, and how stakeholders perceive the school [2]. An inviting educational environment will carry themes of passionate partnership, motivational inspiration, and organic nous of affinity [21]. The high school principal can have the most significant effect of any individual on the school to create such an environment [20]. The principal can influence a productive school climate by following the tenets of invitational education theory. [10]

Novak and Purkey [18] referenced, "...being an invitational educational leader is like being on a tennis court with another" (p. 70). The leader controls what can be controlled then delivers the idea or concept to the other. The goal is to make solid contact, then in a dialogical fashion, allow the other to receive it. The leader bases this in an inviting stance [18]. Novak and Purkey [18] defined the principles of invitational leadership to be:

Care - Possessing full receptivity to the other through de-centering oneself and listening for interests and meaning expressed by the other.

Respect - Give the other person time to own their part of the relationship.

Trust - Recognize the interdependence of people. Possessing confidence and predictability of others' abilities and integrity.

Optimism - Understanding that human potential is untapped, and there is a better chance of good things happening if there are a positive mindset and belief of others.

Intention - Leaders know the direction they are going while being proactive using a variety of methods, yet self-correcting. (p.72)[18]

The principal can integrate these principles into his or her stance through ensuring the most intentionally inviting environment using the Five Ps: people, places, policies, programs, and processes (p.12) [10]. Educational leaders at the principal level have an opportunity not to limit themselves to live in this inviting stance at the professional level, yet inviting educational leadership seeks human potential in all areas of the leader's life in these domains. [18](p. 14). These domains within the invitational leadership framework are:

People - People are the emissaries of the school. They create and maintain the environment where relationships are built on a sense of collegiality.

Places - The area that is the easiest to change, the landscape, and upkeep of the school can announce that inhabitants of the school are invited and welcomed.

Policies - A significant influencer on how the school is perceived concerning fairness, inclusivity, democracy, and respectfulness.

Programs - Formal or informal, the programs must work for the benefit of everyone where they reflect an invitational environment.

Processes - Created using a democratic process where the end-users are involved in their creation and ongoing revisions creating an attitude of, "We are all in this together." (p. 19) [10]

Furthermore, explored were the levels of functioning within invitational leadership [10]. Examples of these functions are:

Intentionally Disinviting Level 1 People are pushed to the out-group through the leader purposefully devaluing the human spirit.

Unintentionally Disinviting Level 2 Leaders are unaware of the harm they are causing through insensitivity, abruptness, or lack of forethought.

Unintentionally Inviting Level 3 Leaders carry a great spirit, however they lack in intentionality and commitment. When the magic wears off and they do not know why, they begin to disengage.

Intentionally Inviting Level 4 Leaders are intentional with their practices to ensure a deep commitment to caring and democratic purposes. They carry and appreciation for people and their development. (p. 20)

Being an invitational leader gave the leader direction, purpose, and skill in their actions [19], while leading with social justice orientations [8], where they carried themselves with arrogant humility, passionate vision, and a tenacious commitment to justice [12]. Therefore, invitational leadership as the overarching theoretical framework combined with social justice theory will be the preeminent and most concise lens in which to address the problem of practice for this research study.

DESIGN OF STUDY

For this qualitative study, the data were collected and analyzed with the intention where, "...the researcher drives a general abstract theory of a process, action, or interaction grounded in the views of participants"[22] (p. 14) using a social constructivist lens. The researchers endeavored to understand the multiple realities that existed between the researchers and participants as they pertain to invitational leadership and social justice [22]. The researchers were most

“interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they want to understand their experiences” [22](p. 5). The research aimed to understand the practices of the adults through semi-structured qualitative investigations [22] on why they continued to engage in the school as an employee or a community partner concerning the invitational educational leadership practices of the principal [10] or enhanced by the leader’s social justice orientation [8]. The research told the story of two different high schools serving high minority populations from low socio-economic backgrounds with words in a qualitative fashion, rather than numbers in a quantitative manner [22]. The first, School A, in a major city located in California, serving a predominantly Latino student population. The second, School B, in a major Midwestern town serving a majority black population. With semi-structured interviews taking place with administrators, front office personnel, teachers, and community partners, social constructivist lens as discussed by Creswell [22] will be appropriate to provide, “comparison of data with emerging categories and theoretical sampling of different groups to maximize the similarities and differences of information” (p.13).

SETTING

For the setting, the researchers selected the use of a purposeful sample [22] to meet the parameters established by the literature. Merriam [23] based purposeful sampling on the premise of wanting “to discover, understand, and gain insight . . . [to] select a sample from which the most can be learned” (p. 63). Purposefully selected were these two settings based on the following criteria: high minority student population, high poverty, the principal in the school for over three years, and lower teacher turnover. Due to the travel restrictions by the COVID-19 pandemic and desire to keep the health of both the subjects and the researchers, conducted through videoconferencing and telephone interviews with people who work or partner with two different high schools was this inquiry. School A had a student body of over 1400 students, predominantly Latino and a minority of Asian-American origin located in the Silicon Valley of California. The school served a high poverty population with over 84% qualifying free and reduced lunch. According to the state Department of Education website, School B had a student body of approximately 400 students that are 82% Black, 4% Latino, and the remaining identified as White. The students came from homes where 100% qualified as low socioeconomic. In the researchers’ visits to each of the schools, the researcher has seen evidence of invitational behaviors by both the leaders and staff as well as physical evidence of being invitational throughout the building. The discussions with each school principal had displayed evidence of social justice orientations, as outlined by Theoharis [12]. Each of the staff has had members share stories with the researcher describing a culture that keeps them coming back as being ones where they see themselves as advocates for the students who need them most even in the face of inequitable resources.

Participants

To gain the most profound insight into the possible connection between the principal leading through the creation of an inviting school climate with a social justice orientation [8], chosen were two principals. They were selected due to their leading schools that met the criteria of being a high minority, high poverty high schools in urban settings where there was evidence of teachers and community members staying engaged year over year. In addition, the principals had been leading their schools for over three years. The researchers started by interviewing the principal of each school (n=2).

Maximum variation sampling [23] took place next to include a variety of adults to achieve multiple lenses. As such, following the interview of the principal was that of the support administrators as they are presumed to be the most closely connected in understanding and integrating the vision of the principal at the day-to-day school level (N=4). Included in additional interviews was the front office, administrative assistant, as she was the person who served as the threshold to access to the principal (N=2) and a school counselor (N=2), as they had a direct connection to hear from students regarding cultural successes and challenges within the building. Additionally, using a snowball method [23] the principal and assistant principal identified at least five teachers who have been at the school for more than five years (N=10). Additionally, the snowball method was used once again to identify community members to understand why they continue to engage with and have confidence in the school (N=4). Therefore, the total of participants was twenty-two participants.

Data Collection

The initial intent of the research was to include data collection processes that included observations, interviews, documents, and audio-visual materials [22]. Unfortunately, due to the 2020 Covid-19 Pandemic, both schools were closed well beyond the time the observations were to take place, disqualifying the researchers from being able to complete this type of data collection. However, document analysis occurred along with interviews using a videoconferencing or phone interview formats.

Interview Protocol

As previously stated, the data collection protocols used in this study entailed semi-structured interviews with twenty- two participants to explore further any connection between the principal of the school, creating an inviting school climate with a social justice orientation [8]. Before choosing participants, the researchers created the semi-structured, open-ended questions protocol. The wording of the questions were constructed as not to lead the interviewee, nor display any bias of the interviewer [22] and were modified according to their role. Before the interview, reviewed by a group of educators not engaged in this inquiry was the interview protocol. The questions were modified, and the process helped to establish face validity [23]. The interviews took place on an individual face-to-face basis through live videoconferencing or phone interviews as not to disqualify any participants due to lack of internet access during the state-mandated or individually chosen quarantine period of 2020.

The 15-item interview questions were semi-structured to allow for a consistent guide through the more than twenty participants that enabled specific data to be mined [22]. The interview questions were open-ended with probing questions to allow the stories told in the words of the interviewees [22]. The semi-structured format also allowed for flexibility for perspectives that lean to being unique from others [23]. Each of the interviews were recorded so the interviewer will be able to take the time to focus on the dialogical conversation while not being preoccupied with writing down each step of the answer [22] [23].

Documents

Throughout the data analysis, research notes helped to document the importance of elements of the data and reflected the initial concepts followed by the refining categories and then into themes. In addition to the raw data materials, such as school handbooks, faculty agendas, and written correspondence to teachers and parents, these documents served to triangulate [22]

the analysis. In addition, other documents were analyzed as suggested by the principals, respectively, utilizing the developed protocol.

Data Analysis

Merriam [23] referenced while data collection is something that a researcher can get better with through practice, "Analyzing these data is a much more daunting task" (p. 175). She further discussed the data collection should be simultaneous with analysis because the researcher will never know what data they will find. Therefore, the researchers began the initial analysis during and in between the collection of data throughout the process [22]. The interview questions were open-ended; hence, the impact of the process will be to aggregate common words and emotions into five to seven themes [23].

As the data was hand-coded as it is collected, the words and emotions from the targeted groups of principals, teachers, and community partners, common themes emerged to tell the story of what kept all of the individuals coming back year over year [22]. The categories, then themes, emerged through a review of the transcripts were, breaking data down into bits of information and then assigning these bits to categories or classes which bring these bits together again [23].

FINDINGS OF STUDY

Research Question One: What tenets of invitational leadership and social justice orientation are evident within the leadership style of the principal?

For this research, the focus was on the potential realized in the 5 P's of invitational leadership: people, places, programs, processes, and policies [19]. The researchers had the respondents, including the principals themselves; respond to open ended questions regarding the level of how intentionally inviting the school leader's actions connected to the five P'S.

People

Upon the researchers' first visit, Principal A came out to introduce himself with a handshake and the assistant principal who would be the primary contact with whom the researchers would be working. Principal A believed the work that he and his staff do should always come from a place of service. He saw the school as being a place where education was a core purpose but had the small-town ethos where the school could be the hub to everything else. When he noted, "When people come who need something, we see to get them what they need. We embed them in the work as we are always trying to create the communal effort to meet the need." While he identified as White, he was committed not just to coming into the community to serve, but to be of the community as evidenced by the connections that he made bringing in so many partners, being fluent in Spanish, and ensuring that he had translators for the families where Vietnamese may have had been the primary language.

The sentiments experienced by the researchers and put forth by Principal A were echoed by his team that they were all there to serve a need. It was repeatedly stated that the modeling of this practice started with Principal A. When one went to the school, a handshake should have been expected. The staff saw themselves as public servants who understood that they put value in cross training, so they were able to give service in the quickest and most convenient way to the person needing help. Even when Principal A was in a meeting or on the path to do something else, he would take the time to acknowledge the person who needed support to address their needs immediately, set up a time to give support, or get them connected with the person who

could best help. This was not only for adults, but every student in the building as well. Principal A could tell you the story of every student in his building. This was echoed unprompted in seven of the ten interviews.

The staff and partners felt that this intentionality to see each individual supported and develop not only aimed at the students and external stakeholders, but themselves as well. A longtime teacher who had moved into the role as a student advisor shared that she had never seen another school where the school leader created such space for her to be who she wanted to be in such intentional support of students. It is common for Principal A to make time for any staff member with an open-door policy including in the middle of lunch. One colleague reflected, "He is so giving to all of us. It is not unlike him to offer half of the meal on his plate to the person in the room without food." When asked what else that the researchers should know about his leadership a teacher pondered, "I have not been able to figure out how to engage the people who will not come through my open door."

As the leader of a performing arts high school, Principal B, a Black woman in her mid-forties was known by the staff and students as being a triple-threat; she could dance, sing, and act. It was not unlike her to put herself out there with her students to either perform for the community alongside of them or create the space for her staff and students to shine. A visit to the school website was a place where one could see video of Principal B acknowledging there would be challenges ahead in this form of virtual learning during a pandemic followed by a video of the teachers in the dance community giving individualized attention to students all over the city through a virtual screen.

Principal B knew that her population of students and those drawn to teach them may be considered by many in mainstream thinking to be a bit different, even a bit "weird." However, Principal B wanted every one of her staff and students to know that they were encouraged to be their authentic selves. They should have come as they were and they would be supported at the school, her alma mater. She led by being herself with her vibrant personality where she acknowledged that she was outgoing, loved to be the life of the party who brought everyone in, while holding the right balance of getting done what needed to be done and having fun at the same time. One of the staff members interviewed who graduated with her in high school with her described her as being the same person in this way for the previous 25 years.

The balance also came in the ability to slow down enough to see each person in the building. The penultimate example of this was a literal, "I See You!" campaign where she announced to her principal peers at a district level meeting that they all needed to ensure that all 20,000 plus students were seen in the district during that academic year. She knew this deep within her soul as when she was in high school, her parents were dealing with addictions and the family bouts of homelessness, it was her teachers who saw her. The superintendent loved the idea and challenged her to go do something about it. Not one to back down as a "triple threat", she accepted the challenge only to humbly stand in front of her staff a few hours later to share with them what she did, and she needed help. The project resulted in the theme of the year being the "I See You!" campaign where students met on the first day of the year with every staff member wearing the mantra and all 400 students consistently seen throughout the year in a plethora of ways.

The staff appreciated her ability to be present. She was a listener who was willing to go to bat for the team when edicts came down from the larger district. A department in the school had been ensuring culturally relevant pedagogy being taught in their building to engage their students with relevant content. The district then came with a structured program that took away autonomy from the teachers. Principal B advocated for the teachers and the instruction in the building and they were able to continue with their instruction as they had been. When she realized that the challenges of primary and secondary trauma were heavily affecting her students and staff, having been a survivor herself, she created a "Peace Room" where the ambiance was set for meditation, praying, resting or whatever else was needed to gain the tools to be resilient and go about the educational, artistic, and community tasks.

The level of invitation at the school may have best been told by a 75-year-old teacher who pounded his desk in emphatic support as he shared his desire to teach at least 5 more years under Principal B's leadership.

She goes over and beyond to fight for the students and teachers for the exposure of what they need. You do it for sports, you can do it for performing arts. You know you are coming to a place where the arts are just as important as academics. This is your home away from home. A certain percentage of student that the children have makeshift homes. I used to wonder why kids did not want to go home. That is because these kids do not always have things at home. Some do not have food, social life, a mother, or father. She makes sure that what this place was for her, it is for them. They are exposed to new things and they are learning every day.

Another teacher shared:

You could walk into many urban high schools and there is an attitude of the administration that the teacher hired had better figure it out or get out. That is not the case with (Principal B). There is a lightness of touch, a warmth and trust that is given until there is a reason not to. Before she came, it was not a warm welcoming place. The administration before was leading at a challenging time where the school may have needed to be shut down. It got turned around. Then (Principal B) came and it feels much more welcoming now.

The essence of Principal B's desire to be inviting to others did not stop at the building where she worked. She informed her staff it was the expectation that they work in the best interest of all students. She created a Facebook group for Black female educators to support one another in their growth, something that was noted that she might not have been willing to do earlier in her career.

Places

School B allowed itself to be known in the community from with a painting of active performing arts student silhouettes immersed in the school's acronym that takes up half the three-story wall. The near one-hundred-year-old building, described by one staff member "as a disaster of a building," could have easily fell into self-induced squalor. However, as noted by Purkey and Novak (2015), "Even if a school building is ancient, it is still possible to create a clean, attractive, and inviting physical environment." (p.6) School B does just that. Due to district-wide safety policies students and visitors do have to go through a metal detecting screening. In many schools people are met with a security officer barking directives, however it was noted by both

the researcher and interviewees that the security officers were some of the most intentionally inviting people as they welcome each visitor to the school and direct them where to go next.

While sharing the right side of the building with another school that was focused on ROTC theme, if one walked left, they could get the feel that they were in an art gallery with a mixture of hung paintings, direct on the wall and lockers murals, and posters advertising upcoming or celebrating past events. One of the murals grew each year as each graduating class was allotted a space to leave their mark through their artwork. The main entrance to the building was adorned with the pre-COVID-19 theme of the "I See You" campaign as Principal B stated, "Even in these times, we want anyone who does come in our building to know they are seen." Amid other spaces within the halls were bully boxes where students could identify the need for support, data walls celebrated academic growth of students, and reminders in the unapologetic belief that as Principal B noted, "Some of the most talented students in the country go here."

School A was like many open-air California school grounds. There were not tight hallways, but classroom doors that opened to the outside air. Over the thirteen years, that Principal A had been there, several bond measures had passed. Where it was once a school that was filled with 800 square foot classrooms that lacked windows, had lights that took several minutes to warm up to light the dark places, and void of any type of collaborative space. Those same spaces had been transformed into buildings where classrooms were 1200 square feet, every 3 rooms had a common workspace for teachers, and windows adorn classrooms not only to the outside, but shared lights and vision between the rooms. The principal's administrative assistant described the transformation of the school that her own children attended, "I used to work in the bookroom that did not have a window, but instead had a cage, bars, and plexiglass. It gave me the feeling of incarceration when in there. All of those places are gone now."

The benefit of having a principal exceed the two-year average tenure at an urban high school (NASSP.org, 2020) like this was evident in this physical plant transformation that had happened with this school building. Where many schools will justify putting the money first into athletic fields, Principal A worked closely with the district to ensure that it would be prioritizing turning the academic classrooms into inviting learning space be the priority. The symbolism (Bolman & Deal, 2008) of this commitment was magnified when the absolute last piece of construction to the primary physical plant was the administration building. During the time that upgrades were happening other places, the administrative team continued to work in the oldest building on campus, and then moved into a backroom in the library during construction.

While the school does have a multi-purpose room and a student run bookstore, the most welcoming place on campus may have been the library. This was the hub of where students gathered during the times before and after school, lunchtime, and other open periods. What was unique about what went on during this time as noted by a staff member is that students were not buried in their phones, but buried in conversations with one another.

The courtyards were filled with motivational quotes and student created murals. Throughout these spaces there were flyers posted for opportunities for students to join in a variety of different programs, extra-curricular activities, and academic opportunities. Students had their areas of where they gathered and due to the consistency of where the adults gathered, they engaged in community with them as well.

Programs

Programs were explored through the opportunities shared on the website as well as what the staff members shared through the interview process. The researchers found that programs were abundant to meet the needs of the diverse and high needs populations of their schools. While both schools were intentionally inviting, each of the two schools had its own distinct approach.

School A, led by their principal, had an approach that if the building was needed and the space was available the building was shared. The staff internally as well as external partners who needed the space ran the programs. Principal A saw the physical space as a connection point for the supportive actions of the staff and the community members who had an aim to serve. He noted that while they had formal programs, they had ones that are even more informal. Families trusted the school so when there was a need, the school is where they went. Whether it was immigration issues, the need for food or Covid-19 testing, the community saw it as a safe space to be.

When A became principal of the high school, the school was averaging 800 – 900 suspensions per year. In the 2019-20 school year that number was down to just 22. Principal A shared that it took many supports from many different areas including mindset shifting with the staff and additional supports for students and their families as programs were integrated in to replace the harsh punishments of the zero tolerance policies that were inherited when Principal A came in. One of the programs included was referenced as the “Zip Code Program” where leaders in the school were working to eradicate the disproportionality of children of color being ensnared by the juvenile justice system. In the program, they collaborated with law enforcement, gang prevention program, and the public defender’s office to offer students supports that would leave to behavioral adjustments that would lead to outcomes that are more positive. The school shifted away from citing low-level offenses. They worked with students to become justice involved by better understanding how to advocate for their needs with authority figures. The school also had mental health counselors who spoke the first language of the home, whether it was, Spanish or Vietnamese. As noted by the ELL teacher, “When so many of the students have trauma they were dealing with, it is made that much easier to confront when someone is helping in your first language.” Every Thursday, an attorney from the public defender’s office was on campus for students to come ask questions that may pertain to them, a relative, or a friend of concern. The director of the gang intervention program started a handball league. Principal A and the director met with each gang, talked about what they needed, and were able to create a space where people put down their weapons and instead engaged in pro-social activities where northern and southern gangs challenged one another in a peaceful and respectful way.

While Principal B aimed to ensure that programmatic opportunities were also maximized, she was a bit more selective in guiding the culture in who they were going to let in for program originating outside of the school. There were two things that she wanted to ensure were in place. The first was that their vision for the program they wanted in their school was going to be a benefit for her students, and aligned with school’s vision to accept all students for who they were, and how they came to school each day. She knew that the students in her school would fit in categories of, “otherness” in characteristics including, but not limited to race, sexuality, gender, personal appearance, socio-economic status. The programs were not going to be open to any outside entities who may come in judgement or to “influence students to be anyone other

than their authentic selves.” The second was working through the democratic ethos that the staff members believed that it was going to be good for their students. She noted to the researchers, “When your organization approached us, I needed to ask my team if this was a partnership that they believed was going to benefit our staff and students. Thankfully, they did. However, had they not, then (your program) would not have been here.”

School B also ensured that they had programs to support the social-emotional health of their students who come from a community that regularly ranks in the top ten for violent crimes. They had a care team who handled referrals from staff or students for students who may have needed additional support. A male school leader was encouraged to start a club for male students who needed the same. The students who came to the invite skewed mostly being straight Black males who felt they did not have a place in the school. Principal B reflected that this left her White male students out and that the school would need to find a way to ensure those students had support in the school. A female group was also created as an affinity group to instill additional peer support and personal pride.

The programs that are the greatest lynchpin within the community are the performing arts programs. It was noted by several staff members that when their students were going to be performing there were people in the community, well beyond their family members, who made it a point to attend. The talents of the students are on display whether the dancers were performing in a theater, the guitar group at a community festival, or the painted artwork was shared at a local street fair. To excite other young people, the students from High School B regularly visited younger students in the district’s elementary and middle schools. The emotional expressions of the students were shown through their art as exemplified by murals created in their community as another person of color was killed in their community.

Processes

In the tenets of invitational education, “...a democratic ethos, collaborative and cooperative procedures, and continuous networking among teachers, students, staff, parents, and community should characterize the process that give life to the school [19] (p. 23).” Each of the schools displayed a commitment to democracy and the feedback of stakeholders engaged in collective ownership of creating the way things are done at each of their schools.

At School B, students were encouraged to find the support they need to maximize their experience at their school. If they wanted to start a club, Principal B told them that they needed to find an adult sponsor in the school, and she would help them find the resources to make it happen. As a small school where arts are the focus, they did not have the resources for inter-scholastic sports, so the students worked with the school to have intramural sports in the school. Students who wanted to maximize their academic talents were encouraged to enroll in an Advanced Placement course. Unlike other schools, there were not processes that were designed to keep students out of harder classes, but instead designed to keep inviting them in. The challenge to this was the ability to find teachers in the math and science areas. At the quarterly talent show, students can select themselves to perform without a laborious try-out process.

Principal B worked with her teachers to ensure that they made decisions in the best interest of their students. Processes were evaluated collaboratively with the teachers including what

classes should be offered, content resources that could be used as long as state standards were being met and academic skills being built, a book-room being started, student-support themes like the, "I See You" campaign, and what school partnerships should happen. "She (Principal B) is unafraid to advocate for her teachers and students and allow them to advocate for themselves." The evidence was consistent in the maximized resources in the school.

At School A, processes included rather than exclude as noted by one teacher, "Processes are set up to bring people in." Another teacher noted, "To a fault, he (Principal A) runs under a democratic process. He really values feedback from multiple groups before he moves on." Referenced, as evidence of this was a program that would have allowed for greater technology in the building. It seemed clear to the teacher who shared the story that Principal A wanted to bring the program in. The teacher wanted it. Yet, when the staff voted, if there were not enough votes that would lead to staff ownership of the new system. It did not go through.

While stakeholders knew that there was a line of command, they also recognized they were encouraged to advocate for what they believed to be right for students. Principal A said of his mindset regarding processes, "We need to open doors, open access, then use relationships." The evidence of the principal's open door came through the voices of most interviewed, most succinctly summarized by a staff member who shared, "People know there is a line of command. Whether teachers or students, they know they will be listened to when they are advocating for themselves. There is something about that, which seems so empowering to me."

Examples of processes being followed to get things started for which they advocated included the "Zip Code Project" that brought together the school, the police, anti-gang organizations, and community groups to keep young people from being ensnared in the criminal justice system. Others like the restorative practices replacing punitive practices. Included were an in-school academy created for English language learning students in just three years; teachers being able to offer a class if they got enough students and the content could fit into the requirements of the state; grant money found to pay teachers to start clubs; created a school response to support Black students and students of color in response to the killing of George Floyd. As noted by one respondent, "He (Principal A) is not the only one who comes up with all of the ideas, however if someone can show why it is good for our students, he will do everything he can to support it to become part of our school."

Policies

Most significantly studied was the mission and vision of the schools to draw the correlation between what the mission espoused was to happen at each school and what those participating in the shared.

School A's mission statement read as follows:

(High School A's) mission is to provide a safe, caring learning environment where students achieve the academic, aesthetic, personal and social development required to continue learning, pursue post-secondary education, compete in a changing job market, and participate in a multicultural democratic society.

The reflections of the staff aligned with that the policies "...are set up to bring people in."

They referenced the use of restorative practices over zero-tolerance. Noted as was the ability to enroll in advanced academic courses over gate keeping for the perceived elite students. Additionally, grading practices not locked in mantras of “this is the way we have always done it,” but instead reflecting upon how to create an anti-racist grading system. In addition, facilities being shared rather than held back due to bureaucratic paperwork; and most importantly was the unofficial open-door policy of the administration. The “safe, caring learning environment” that will lead to options in an ever-changing world was apparent throughout the research.

School B’s mission statement reads as follows:

Our Mission: (School B) High School creates an environment where students receive an exemplary academic and artistic education that highlights their talents and prepares them to meet the challenges of our dynamic global society.

Our Vision: The vision of (High School B) is to raise to the highest level possible the academic and artistic achievements of all its students. The educational program is designed to create a nurturing environment where students receive quality academic and artistic education that prepares them to compete successfully at the post-secondary level or to perform competently in the world of work. In addition to the development of academic and artistic knowledge and skills, students provided an environment where they learn to communicate effectively, enhance their physical and emotional well-being, acquire a passion for life-long learning and demonstrate the ability to do critical thinking and be creative.

It was apparent there was a necessity for strong policies during the previous administration who was trying to get the school back from the brink of closure due to a lack of success. Several participants in the study believed that they were needed at the time; however, that culture had made a shift for the better. A teacher who stated, “She (Principal B) gets rid of the policies that hold people back”, best summarized the attitude toward policies of the staff. Another referenced how she adjusted the entrance policy as the Black male demographic was disproportionately keeping students out. Principal B noted, “We have a district code of conduct which we follow. However, we are going to look closely at the data to see if we are applying them fairly. Some things are situational.” School B recognized that if they were to, “raise to the highest level possible the academic and artistic achievements of all its students,” as stated in their mission statement, they were going to have the students in school and engaged. As summarized by one teacher, “We have this incredible group of professionals, the admin, the teachers, the two counselors who are therapists, a parent liaison, and a social worker. We are looking for ways to support kids.”

Social Justice Orientation

Regarding social justice orientation the two school leaders had a commonality for the reasons they each wanted to work in a school where their students came from under-resourced populations. For Principal B, it was the school from where she graduated. When she was going through school as a teen, her family did not have the capacity to give her the support that she needed. There were times that she felt alone. She spoke of never wanting any of her students to have that same feeling that she had. She recognized that it was her school community that was the constant for her, and she was willing to do anything to pay that forward. “Everything is not about money. It is about inner peace. It is an honor and a blessing to work at the school from where I came. There is something magical working with individual who are so talented.”

Principal A came from a place of service in the hotel industry. While he knew that he wanted to continue to serve people, he had a deeper desire than just bringing them their food or their sheets to those who could afford it. He saw an opportunity deeply fulfilled by serving students who had not found success in school as he prepared them for their general equivalency diploma. His career then continued to stair step into the next level of service as a classroom teacher, teacher leader, assistant principal, before landing in the principal role. While he never wanted to be more than a teacher leader, he was not willing to let go of the work of the collective group in the high school where he was working, so he would step forward and take each new role. While he had many opportunities to continue to move up the ladder into the central office level, he had not moved. "I do not see a bigger impact being further away from the community. I want the ability to have an impact. I do not want to serve a community at another school. This group of student and group of families make it fulfilling. More money would not be more fulfilling."

As one teacher joked,

Her passion is social justice! She links the social and the justice. We are a performing arts school. Nothing about this school is humble. The kids are trained to be in your face. Our Principal is a triple threat who can dance, sing, and act. So of course, she is going to be arrogant.

Principal B responded to having arrogant humility with this:

I could always use more work in humility. I am always reminded of my past. I think of those humble beginnings. I can listen to a parent and open my heart to show empathy. I am good at it. It is still a growth area, but I think I am good. I keep learning from team members.

Her team members echoed that about how much they loved the arrogance she carried about their school. In every presentation she gave, whether to the district, the families, the students, or the community, she reminded everyone that she had the best school in the city. She knew there was work to be done, but consistently reminded her team of their greatness. She had made staying confident in your school a cornerstone of the book she wrote to help other educators who worked in a high needs schools. She encouraged them to beyond hard work, it is "heart work." As stated confidently by one teacher, "Arrogant humility is (Principal B). She possesses a fierce tenacious energy as she sees every kid in our school as being her. She wants to give them what she needed."

While the arrogance was evident in such a positive way, the humility was just as evident. As shared by one teacher, "She has plenty of awards that she has won, but that is not what she stands in front of our staff to talk about. She is in front of us being vulnerable about a challenge that she or the staff is facing and looking for ways to improve." She had been a fierce advocate for adjustments to be made to more intentionally inviting of Black males when the data told her that they were disproportionately being suspended or not getting in due to certain standards.

As echoed by his staff, Principal A proudly shares about the great things the school is doing. He shared about the partnerships in the community, the talent of the staff, and the brilliance of the students with great confidence. He consistently stood in front of his staff with the latest research on what is best for their students while he left the door opened to be questioned. As one counselor noted, "He knows what he wants, but will relook at it so it will work for so many more." When asked how he fit into Theoharis's (2007) description of a social justice leader he responded in a humble tone, "Sometimes, I feel arrogant." This was backed by his admission

that while he wanted to support teachers, he also did not back down from releasing a tenured teacher if what they were doing was hurting kids. It was shared by those interviewed that his arrogance came in good ways including ensuring they were going to do what is best for kids, a conviction that he was going to learn what he needed to learn as he was willing to put in the time to do it. "He loves squeezing banana juice out of lemons."

The arrogance was consistently counterbalanced with humility throughout the interviews best summed up on the story about a program that Principal A was interested in having brought to the school.

There was this proposal for new technology. (Principal A) knew that our staff could successfully implement it really well. It was comprised of project-based learning and team teaching. He fought for it, but there were enough teachers that did not buy in, so he said that is fine. He did not pressure anyone. He did not tell anyone who did not want it to leave. The exact opposite happened in another school I am aware of. That school was not as well suited. It passed and teachers left. They have had 3 principals since then in less than five years.

Others noted him being the most vulnerable principal they had ever come across. "He does not have all the answers. He is reflective. He opens the opportunity for others to carry a meeting. He is a nurturer who is willing to push."

The participants in the study talked about Principal A sharing of the mission statement of the school regularly. He puts letters and videos on the website to let the community know that the school is there to be a resource. Staff members who had him at School A when he was a teacher shared that he was the first person who truly made them believe that they could go to college. Other talked about him recognizing what each person could bring to be a part of the solution at the school. "Legitimately, with what he wants to do, he is the reason a lot of us are still here. We will go far beyond because of him. When he leaves, there could be an exodus." The gang outreach director expressed gratitude when sharing, "He wants to work with the families who need him most. He knows he cannot change people, but he can help them make changes in their time. His heart is big for these kids and their parents." It was shared repeatedly that he was going to challenge himself to learn the most and work the hardest of anyone in the building, yet what he wanted to continue to share was how hard he knew the jobs of his staff were. It was acknowledged by participants that the level of drive expected out of the staff at times would lead some good people to leave, yet they still were committed to the mission set forth. As stated by a committed teacher, "At the end of the day, he is here for the kids."

Passion was a word often used to describe Principal B in the interviews before even arriving at this question. The seed of the passion were driven by many things including her upbringing, her seeing every child as her own, her commitment to the community, the drive to develop the best teaching staff possible, the desire to make the world that much better for her three daughters, and to maximize her own skills in supporting others. She seized each opportunity to use her triple threat skills to share her passion for the school and the vision they must support each student who comes through their door. She knew that she could not do it alone, so she focused on bringing in the talents of the stakeholders including staff, students, and community members as supported by one of the teachers as he discussed he ability to guide while still giving autonomy, "She keeps her hands off while knowing where to go." She consistently shared

the vision for the school in staff meetings, school performances, at central office, and in the book that she had just written.

Principal B knew students have a voice and are wanting to use it. "They just announced the charges against the police who killed Breonna Taylor. When situations like this happen, our children want to respond. It is our job to teach them how to have a voice and move in the right ways." The government teacher echoed, "We have the freedom to discuss the relevant issues of the day. (Principal B) trusts me to have the conversations with our students. I can guide them. She allows a fair amount of protesting for students to voice about justice and equity in society." Another teacher shared, "She has a commitment to justice. When she saw the challenges of Black males, she challenged and supported a young Black male teacher to be a mentor. It resulted in a group for those young men to be heard." Her openness on exploring her own blind spots regarding the LGBTQIA students was modeling of how to self-reflect and be vulnerable in front of the staff as a learner was appreciated by many staff members. One teacher shared.

She had to learn about her own homophobia. She has been reading and bringing in speakers. She listened to students. She cut the Chick-Fil-A fundraiser off due to their policies against those students. She opened herself and the school to learn about the LGBTQIA community.

Principal B's tenacious commitment to justice in her own words:

Our students have gifted brains. It is these brains that heal the world. Some may consider them weirdos, but it is those weirdos like Michael Jackson and Prince who they turn to heal and make sense of the world that we live in. I am a social justice advocate. I encourage our students to empower them. I know our student leaders who we can give the space to do it. No one was taking African-American Literature, so when they pushed to have it, we gave it to them. I want them to become critical conscious thinkers. We need to give them the space to do that. We may have to reel them back in if they are going off the rails, but we can guide them.

There is not a story that captures the tenacious commitment to justice exemplified by Principal A than that shared by his assistant principal.

He knows that it should not be this way. He started in a continuation school. He knows what it looks like for a school system to fail kids. He has a collage of student photos, but he keeps all kids in mind. Like a kid who was a gang member. The rule was you fight, you are expelled. He questioned the zero-tolerance policy. The student left the school, and he was killed. Vito keeps that student's picture up as a reminder that when we treat a kid as a throw away kid, bad things can happen. He knows, feels their stories, and believes in their humanity. He knows they deserve better. He thinks, "I cannot retire until someone is going to pick up that work up." He is close to being eligible to retiring, but he cannot leave until he has it figured out. He will hang on until we are in good hands.

The tenacious commitment to justice came out in story after story of Principal A stepping up in ways that could be unpopular for people in mainstream positions of power to speak out for the marginalized. The work that he had done in the summer of 2020 in supporting the Black Lives Matter movement was unwavering when it began with him listening to students and staff as to what they needed in a response. Then responding by sending out a letter to the community clarifying the school's stance of support coupled with Principal A sending out a video of himself

on social media backing each claim made in the letter. The combination of his spoken words, posting of the points and symbolism left no room for interpretation as to where the school stood. This was followed by his support of a march from the school to the city hall to the university where he walked with his students and his own daughter before speaking to the entire crowd to ensure they knew where the school stood in supporting their students of color. When ICE raids were rumored to be happening in the community to find undocumented families, Principal A went on the school intercom system to make it clear that their school was a safe place. If their families were having challenges, they were to come to the school to get the help that they may need. Principal A himself noted his commitment to social justice early in the interview when he admitted.

I am not driven by education. I am driven by education as a social justice tool. Using education as that step. If we are getting 230 kids to college rather than 70 (the number when he took over), we have students who can break the cycle of poverty and injustice.

In all twenty-two interviews done for this study, as they were asked the question of tenets of social justice leadership being arrogant humility, passionate visionary leadership, and a commitment to justice, there was only once that an interviewee stated that not every descriptor fit. Overwhelmingly the response to whether or not the principals acted with a social justice orientation was met with quotes like, "Everything you described here fits her," "From these three points, I see my principal," or "Those three things summarize him."

Research Question Two: How do the tenets of invitational leadership style of the principal impact the retention of teachers within a high poverty school setting?

Each of the principals in the study worked from a sustaining invitational stance composed of elements of invitational leadership, "...reflecting optimism, trust, respect, care, and intentionality [19] (p. 13)." In the recruitment of teachers at School A there had been a great shift under the leadership of Principal A. When he first started out in the principal's role, he scoured job fairs and resumes to find people who he believed would put students and their families first. He stated, "We have always been coming from a place of service. When we go to find a teacher, I am not looking for saviors, I am looking for allies." By 2020, the school no longer needed do those things to find teachers as they had built a culture of which the teachers and community are proud. When there was an opening, there was a person who was connected to a person at the school or who graduated from the school who knew what was happening there and wanted to give back to the community.

Principal B did not find herself to be a great recruiter of teachers yet. "I rely on the teachers and the students to be the great selling point of why a teacher would want to come work at our school." Teachers felt they were brought in on the process a bit later, but believed that the leverage and trust that was given to them, they could help integrate teachers into a culture of support that was spearheaded by Principal B. In the final stage of the interview process, candidates were welcomed into the school and given the opportunity to talk with the teachers in the absence of the principal. As stressed by one teacher, "She does not hide anything in the interviews." Another teacher shared, "It is well established that this work is going to be hard. New teachers come in expecting that they must do well, but there is not the pressure to be perfect. No one beats you down if things do not go well. It is a culture that is constantly accepting people who are trying new things that are best for kids."

At the time of the interview, School A was a month into their school year where on-line learning was taking place due to social distancing. While this could have been a time where the principal could have lamented about how bad things were, he instead saw it as a time of great opportunity.

In the time of Covid, we are all learning together. The way the system has been built, it has not been working for everyone. This is the time to ask the questions. We try to work a collaborative group who will find the answers for our students.

Principal A acknowledged that there were challenges that his students and staff had yet to overcome, yet he still believed that he had the people who could change the trajectory of the lives of young people, including the young people themselves as evidenced by him stating, "We have the mindful populous." Each year the school hosts a holiday luncheon that serves as both a fundraiser for college scholarships and an opportunity to celebrate with the community great things that were happening at the school. The tone was celebratory with a retired teacher coming back to be the master of ceremonies, students who had found success integrating the academic and personal skills learned at School A shared their gratitude for scholarship support, Principal A recognized the accomplishments of the staff and students, and the vision for the school was shared. His optimistic approach is supported by a teacher who shared, "He is unwavering on what he wants us to do what is best for kids."

"When you walk out of her office, you know you can do better!" was the reflective thought of a staff member who had just met with Principal B the day of our interview. When one walked into the building at High School B, they were going to see one or both signs that served as a call to the possibilities of all who cross the thresholds. They say, "I see you!" and "You are free to be the person you want to be!" Each of these messages were seen as expansive by the staff and students. She modeled a desire to be a continuous learner through going into classes to engage at the student level, stand in front of her entire staff to admit that even after several years as the principal of the school, she had not been doing a strong enough job as a straight cisgender Black woman to lead her students who identify as LGBTQIA, or taking the chance herself to hire a writing coach to write a book of her own. As a product of the high school, she knew what education had done for her life and she wanted education to play that same role with her students.

When Principal B took over in the role of principal at the school she noted, and confirmed by those hired by the principal before her that she was following a leader who led "a tight environment wrapped in fear." She knew she had to shift the culture by treating them as professionals and trusting what they were doing in their classrooms, she had them lead professional developments, gave them the resources needed to start clubs to support the students, and when a teacher let her know that students wanted to protest on the main road outside of their building, she worked with the teacher to get what was needed for them to do it safely. It was through her proximity and presence that teachers knew she saw what they were doing and could move forward in confidence. As supported by one teacher, "I feel I have a great deal of independence. I do not feel micromanaged in any sort of way." The story of professional trust given by Principal A to his teaching staff was best told by a teacher:

Everything he does is giving us professional trust. We meet monthly as department chairs. He does not dictate those meetings. He is there, but we will decide what we want to do as

departments and academies. Things may come down from him, but nothing ends with him without the opportunity for feedback.

As noted by a teacher turned administrator, "In the classroom teachers are left to do what they need to do. There is not micromanagement. We have created a school vision and staff values. Teachers work from there." If Principal A knew a teacher was struggling, he would find ways to support, whether it was ensuring that they know his door is open, allocating resources for additional pay opportunities or training, or even jumping in the classroom himself so the teacher can take care of a personal need. He knew he could not do it alone as noted by an office professional, "He uses the personal strengths of others to make sure the place runs smoothly. It runs like a machine and he knows its parts." Another teacher noted that while there was a curriculum from the district, she has been entrusted to use the curriculum she is creating as she knows it is best for her kids.

Having started his career in another industry, Principal A moved into education as a teacher in a continuation school where he taught 17 to 20 year old students who had not had success in several years before becoming a teacher at School A, then to assistant principal, then to principal. He kept in the front of his mind just how hard the profession is daily. "I did not want to be anything other than a teacher leader, but I knew we were a staff who were building some great things at our school and if someone else came in, they may not give the staff the respect to continue creating what we were." The recognition that he needs talented professionals whom he respects was further clarified when he stated, "I include our teachers and staff in decisions that affect their livelihoods. We honor the art of teaching. We are not going to be prescriptive. We are creating collaborative and sustainable practices."

The respect for professionals did not stop with just his staff. When the attorney for the public defender's office called over twenty schools in the area with whom to work to slow the school to prison pipeline, there was not another school that responded and acted upon the invitation for the collaborative project like School A. Each Thursday when the attorney came to the school, he knew that Principal A would have questions for him to elicit his advice. When the director of an anti-gang organization was looking to partner with schools he knew the right partner was Principal A as there was such evidence of respect for the viewpoints of others in a culture where respect is a main currency.

When I first started, we were both very new in our roles. Multiple fights were happening in the school every day. Shootings were in the area. It was pretty bad. We met one another. I noticed he was willing to learn, but not dictate. He learns from the kids, the community. He is willing to try what others suggest.

Principal B saw daily the talent in her staff. She not only had them lead staff meeting and professional development, but also supported creating platforms where they can share their talent in the school community through having performances in the school courtyard or in times of social distancing, a Stevie Wonder alumni and staff tribute band perform on the school webpage. A teacher expressed, "Teachers are allowed to be their authentic selves and in turn this makes students feel safe to be themselves. We have a teacher with purple hair and it is not a problem." In the professional development sessions, it was noted how effectively Principal B engaged right at the table with the teachers and staff as a learner herself. "Because we know

our voice will be respected, we will go talk to her about our ideas and things will happen.” While there were questions by some about the focus being more strongly on self-care than academics, the overall vision and follow-through allowed space for both. As noted by an instructional leader, “Our greatest strength is our focus on culture. We understand that we are part of the solution. We are considered to be one of the best places for teachers and students.”

“This is my family!” Principal B stated. Coming from a leader who had gone to the school at a time of great challenge in her own life, there was an even more believable nature to that statement. As one interviewee affirmed, “She is here because she sees herself in every one of these kids. She knows the power of our staff and the difference that we can make together.” When the 2020-21 academic year had started with stressful challenges Principal B took the time to listen to her staff. She found out that some of the district mandates for paperwork were weighing them down and advocated for them to minimize the amount. “She has a way of making the person to whom she is talking feel like they are the most important person. She does not seem in a rush, yet she seems everywhere.”

Principal B also showed her care by doing the little things to make the staff and students feel valued. She created a “Peace Room” where people could go when the stresses of the day felt too much. She created videos for the staff, students, and community where she acknowledged the challenges of the disruptions brought on by the pandemic of 2020 while offering solutions to ease the burdens. She ensured that her teachers were celebrated at the building and district level for putting in the hard work that they do. They had district level award winners at the administrator, counselor, and teacher levels in the three-year span leading up to this research. The level of care that she had for her school community was recognized by a staff member who stated, “She has the talent that she could go anywhere, but as an alumni, she is so passionate about this school and this district that not only is she here, but her three daughters have also gone through this district.”

The care of Principal A was most evident from those from the community who had attended School A and returned to work there. “(Principal A) is not from here. But he has embraced it as his own. This Italian guy who speaks Spanish, understands how immigrants can be treated from his own family’s experience so he is going to take care of them.” Another, who bid her time at another school until there was an opening to return to her alma mater and work for the principal whom she loved as a student, “In my eyes, I don’t see anything wrong with (Principal A).” Principal A’s caring response to the civil unrest in his community in the spring of 2020 in response to the killing of George Floyd was a point that he saw the need for the school to take a stand to show they cared about their minority Black students and how if one group was affected from his school they all were. He made copies of Ibram X. Kendi’s book *How to be an Anti-Racist* available to staff members. When the students marched, he marched right along with his staff and his students. He cared enough about his students to make it clear publicly in person, on the internet, and on paper that he believed Black lives mattered and he would stand with them.

“Intentionality enables people to create, maintain, and enhance total environments that consistently and dependably invite the realizations of human potential (Purkey & Novak, 2015, p. 3).” The potential of humans can be best realized through designing places, policies, processes, and programs to be personally inviting to each educational leader and all with whom

they come in contact. With the researched evidence share in the responses to questions, one and two of this research it was evident that the goal of each school leader was to be intentional in these areas. Furthermore, through using the snowball method to interview individuals who had been working with the school for an extensive number of years, confirmed was the intentionality of the leaders. Principal A ensured to meet people at the door where he began to share a vision that the school is there to serve the young people of the community. While they would be unable to control what happens outside of school, the school would work with partners on the local, state, and national levels to get the students the support they needed. In turn teachers who joined for the mission wanted to stay to be a part of that team. As posited by a long-time teacher:

"If you are bought in for the mission and want to be a part of social change, then you absolutely want to be here. What makes you want to work for him is that he is working harder than you. Whether that is reading to learn the best practices, spending time in meetings that teachers are leading or directly connecting with students and their families, we all know that no one is working harder than him."

Ten out of ten interviewees responded that his leadership plays a major role for the reasons they stay. Five of them mentioned they will strongly consider leaving when he does unless the replacement's leadership is aligned with his.

Principal B had that same level of support, as nine out of ten respondents stated that she was a reason that teachers stayed while the tenth state that, "She is so teacher centered focused on supporting the self-care of the teachers that while I believe teachers come for the kids, she is not going to be the deterrent that would make some leave like our last principal." Principal B stated, "I want them to be free to be themselves, to have professional autonomy, to seize opportunities to lead, and I am sure to respect them as people and professionals." A highly regarded teacher emphasized:

There is not a week that goes by that we do not talk about how lucky we are to be at this school. The inner city is a hard place to teach, but she makes it lighter. The teachers I respect stay at (our school). I would put our staff up against any in the country.

A remaining teacher shared the story of a teacher who left to move to another state. In two years, she has now been at multiple schools and recently called the interviewee with emotion in her voice as she worried that she would never find another school like School B in which to work. Four teachers brought up on their own that when Principal B leaves, they will consider moving on as well. As a teacher who had recently left the school to accept a job at a major tech company described how intentionally supportive Principal B was to the staff he reflected that, "The only reason good teachers leave the school is because they go on to bigger and better things. If the job at the school could have paid me what this tech company is, I would have never left." Yet, even as intentional, as each administrator was in being invitational it was evident that his or her intentionality did not stop there.

DISCUSSION OF STUDY

Purkey and Novak [19] shared the four levels of the invitational ladder moving from intentionally disinvolving to intentionally inviting through using the focused elements of care, trust, respect, optimism, and intentionality with a focus in the five domains of people, places, policies, programs and processes. The evidence was abundant in each of the researched schools

that while neither principal nor study participants were familiar with the tenets of invitational leadership; they were effective in their integration of the common practices.

Intentional invitational action and social justice as a driving force, emerged as the two themes from this inquiry. They serve as a foundation that principals, can integrate into their practices to increase their chances of reciprocally retaining teachers in the high-poverty, high-minority, high-need urban high schools. Purpose and direction provided through invitational leadership with the five elements sets an implementer in an inviting stance [19]. Similarly, each of the principals embodied the Theoharis [9] defined descriptors of being a social justice leader through carrying themselves with arrogant humility, passionate visionary leadership, and a tenacious commitment to justice. In each of the schools, the drive for social justice had full engagement from the principal and teachers wanting to be in the school.

Implications

To create a learning environment that embraces equity and social justice for all students a principal demonstrates the use of invitational leadership. By doing so this will result in a myriad of implications for practice. One implication would be for universities to emphasize the tenets of invitational leadership within their leadership preparatory training programs for educational leaders. Another implication is for school districts to provide ongoing training in invitational leadership, coupled with a social justice emphasis for not only educational leaders but also teachers. Still another implication is for invitational leadership and social justice theories be in the forefront of all critical discussions in urban settings. By undertaking such intentionality, enriched by the spirit of a partnership between all educators is the school, resulting in the intentionality of passion about social justice for all students and the retention of teachers with the same intentionality.

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