A LENS TO LEAD: INVESTIGATING THE PROVISION OF DIFFERENTIATED SUPPORTS FOR ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TEACHERS

by

ABBY ELIZABETH GAINES

(Under the Direction of Jami Royal Berry)

ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly changed the challenges in elementary schools and has impacted teacher attrition rates in the United States. School leaders must develop their capacity for differentiating support to combat teacher stress levels. This study explores the challenges that elementary school teachers face in one suburban school district post-COVID-19 and how these challenges influence their perceptions of support from school leaders. Literature around three major themes supported this study: challenges through the perspective of suburban elementary teachers in the post-pandemic teaching era, definitions of support in an elementary setting after the year 2020, and different types of administrative support structures and their influence on teacher job satisfaction and working conditions. The research examines teacher resilience, self-efficacy, and support structures through three action research cycles. Data collected through surveys, interviews, and observations reveal a decline in student academic and behavioral stamina, a need for differentiated social support, and the importance of positive teacher-leader relationships. Findings emphasize the role of emotional intelligence and discernment by school leaders in supporting teachers' resilience and self-efficacy.

INDEX WORDS: Post-pandemic education, Resilience, Self-efficacy, Social Support, Support structures, Teacher attrition, Teacher challenges, Teacher-leader relationships

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to the two people who have shown me unconditional love and patience through every success and obstacle in my life. The ones who molded me into someone strong enough to finish this marathon. The ones who helped me to see that God created me for a great purpose and that with a positive mindset and perseverance through challenges, I could make a difference in the lives of others. They supported me through failures and pain, enabling me to develop resilience.

To my Dad, I remember watching you sit at your drafting table with that giant electric eraser and the foot-long horsehair brush sweeping away the evidence of mistakes. But they weren't mistakes, really; they were steps toward progress, evidence of improvement. I learned from you that you will not find peace in making things perfect, but the people you serve are worth making things better. They are worth the effort it takes to become better yourself. Thank you for showing me how big visions become reality: reflect, set a goal, MAKE A PLAN, and follow through with action. You pushed me to seek my potential and encouraged me every step of the way. Feeling the pride of your father can motivate a girl through just about anything. I love you and I'll be forever grateful for your legacy in my life.

To my Mom, I'm so grateful for those days when my heart would race, and I would catch a glimpse into your world from the floor of your classroom closet. I remember thinking I could never be as patient or calm as you were. I remember wondering how you had every one of your students hanging on your every word. It always seemed so effortless, like a well-choreographed dance, full of life. Even today, your way of teaching is so much more than instructions. It's

empowering others to try hard things, persevere, believe in themselves, and shake off the small stuff. Whether it's the wildflowers in the yard, the masterpiece on the wheel, or the words on a page, your kindness and optimism are the water that helps things grow. Thank you for teaching me that supporting the growth of others is the greatest joy. Your positive outlook doesn't come from ignoring reality but from abiding in the peace that comes from trusting in God's plan. I love you, Mom, and will forever be grateful for the countless gifts your presence has given me.

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To my Boys, my heart swells seeing how you have grown into fine young men while I wasn't looking. Reflecting on these last three years, it might have been a blessing that I stepped out of the way as you both found your unique paths. Canyon, I'm in awe of your optimism and resilience. Disappointment doesn't stop you from embracing hard things. The confidence you have built through your trust in God makes you a beacon of light to those around you. I love you to the beach and back. Maddux, watching you navigate the world with curiosity and a clear sense of direction is truly inspiring. You keep your eyes on the word, and it shows. I love you, always. Thank you both for cheering me on as I typed away and showing such genuine interest in my passions. I am incredibly proud of you guys.

To Polly, you were the catalyst for my leadership journey. Thank you for speaking a life over me that I never knew was possible. I made it through with the things you always modeled positivity and GSD!

To Kristen, a truer friend none could find. Thank you for being a constant source of encouragement, managing my "token economy" when needed, and never letting me give up. I promise to do the same for you one day.

To my Action Research Team: Lisa, Lori, Morgan, Tiffany, Kim, Megan, Alexis, Amber, Michele, Bonnie, and Polly, thank you for being an essential resource in bringing this work to life. Your transparency, trust, and willingness to invest time and energy in this process have meant the world to me. You are an amazing group of educators with the biggest hearts for supporting teachers. I have learned so much from your reflections; your words will forever shape my practice.

To the Doctors of 2025, when I say WE did it, I truly mean WE! Not once did I feel alone or disconnected. Thank you for always being willing to share ideas, provide feedback, and keep us laughing through the group text. You have been my support system, validating my stress, disappointment, and frustration, celebrating our milestones, and sometimes reminding me to "just eat the beans!" I look forward to seeing how each of your work impacts the world.

To my doctoral committee members, Dr. Dorsan and Dr. Dayton, thank you for your insightful feedback and the encouragement you provided throughout this process. You consistently reminded me to stay focused on the 'why' that gave purpose to this study. Finally, to my major professor and chair, Dr. Berry, since I was a girl, I have always wanted to be a writer, but academia never seemed like a path I wanted to pursue. Poetry, memoirs, and letters were more my style. Thank you for building my confidence as a writer and helping me to tell the story

of my hope for the future of education. Your feedback never took away my voice; it refined and amplified it so that others could hear my message clearly. Most of all, thank you for reminding me that there can be balance in the pursuit of greatness. Go Dawgs!

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Rising teacher attrition rates have been a concern in the state for which this study occurred since 2015. Between 2008 and 2015, the attrition rate grew to 44% (Henson et al., 2015). The 2022 Professional Association of Georgia Educators Legislative Survey found that "approximately 31% of all responding educators report that they are unlikely or highly unlikely to remain in education for another five years" (PAGE, 2022, p. 6). A post-COVID-19 pandemic United Kingdom teacher study conveyed similar findings, with twice as many teachers reporting intentions to leave the profession (Fullard, 2021). After the pandemic, national and international teachers considered other opportunities outside of the education field (Morrison, 2021; Rainey, 2022).

In 2022, the Georgia Department of Education commissioned a task force to determine the root causes of the increased teacher attrition statewide. The task force reported significant findings in five areas: Assessment, Preserving and Protecting Time, Pressures/Unrealistic Expectations, Teacher Voice and Professional Growth, and Mental Health and Wellness (GaDOE, 2022). A letter from the 2022 Georgia Teacher of the Year, Cherie Bonder Goldman, implored readers to reflect on the voices represented in the report. She told school leaders, "The teachers I know don't want to walk away…But too many of our teachers are running on empty. We cannot change how we got here, but we can change how we go forward."

Many researchers used the term "burnout" to address the problem of teacher retention (ASCD, 2020; GaDOE, 2022; New York Teacher, 2019; Rajendran et al., 2020). Some

have taken offense to label teachers as “burned out” and have redefined the cause of attrition as teacher demoralization (Mineo, 2022; Santoro, 2018; Santoro, 2019). Others in the field blame the loss of control over the teaching environment, increased policies that limit teacher autonomy, and exhaustion from an increased workload (Christian-Brandt et al., 2020; Ryan et al., 2017).

Statement of the Problem

Lucas Pointe Elementary School (LPES, a pseudonym) is situated in the Northeast corner of suburban Allan County. The school was established in 1931 as an educational institution in the community, and by 2024, the school educated and employed second or third-generation students and staff members of Lucas Pointe. The impacts of generational poverty over 90 years have heightened attention to recruiting and maintaining high-quality teachers with a passion for reaching the most at-risk students. As the socio-economic status and diversity of Allan County increased over 20 years, Lucas Pointe has been the last area to experience a change in demographics.

Allan County has been noted as one of the wealthiest counties in the United States for many years. However, the northeastern corner of Allan County is home to many families living below the poverty line. LPES is often called Cinderella, a poor school in a wealthy district. The 2022-2023 school year was the first time the federal government did not award a Title 1 distinction to LPES due to the free and reduced lunch percentage falling below 30%. The percentage reduction caused the school to lose a large amount of federal funding previously used to hire additional staff members and pay for additional instructional materials.

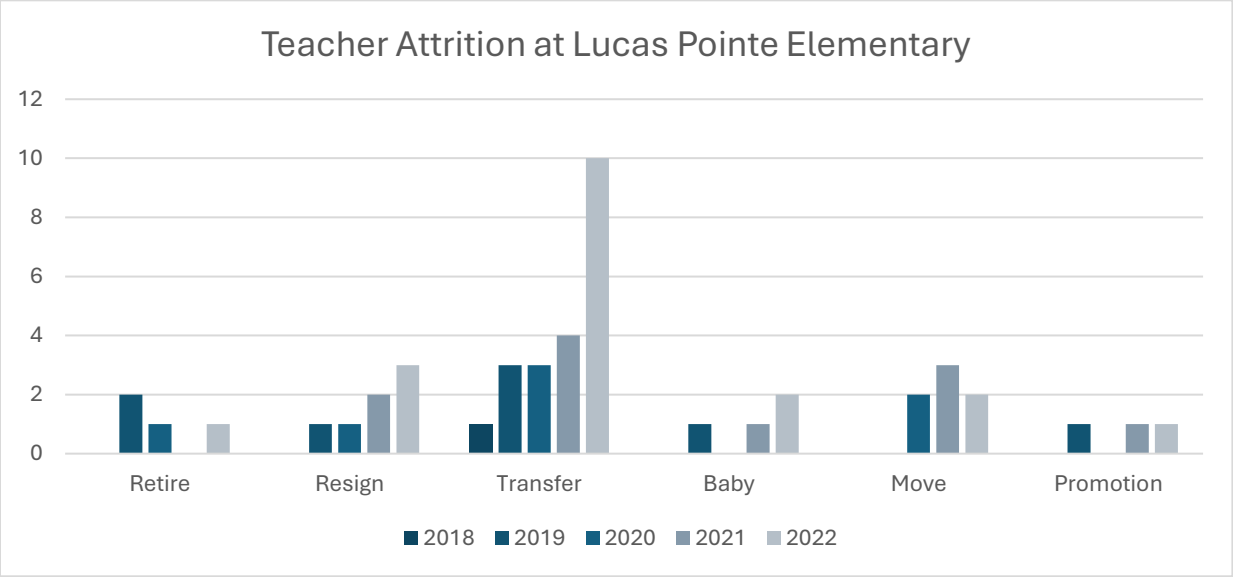
After high leader turnover between 2000 and 2010, the school district assigned the current principal to LPES and saw a significant shift towards achievement growth and positive climate change. Lucas Pointe maintained a 5-star climate rating for the five years before this

study, as indicated by student and parent input and staff surveys. However, like many schools nationwide, LPES experienced deviations from standard public school practices between 2020 and 2022.

There was a sudden shift to virtual instruction at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2022. Some students and teachers continued virtual instruction during the 2020-2021 school year, while others chose in-person instruction that required adherence to strict protocols for student and faculty safety. These protocols significantly limited collaboration and increased academic and social regression for many students who often could not attend school during the 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 school years. While most teachers showed resilience and stamina during the 2020-2022, by spring 2022, rumblings of dissatisfaction and doubt in school choice were heard across the LPES campus. Figure 1.1 represents the reasons presented by staff leaving the school over five years.

Figure 1.1

Teacher Attrition at Lucas Pointe Elementary (2018-2022)



Note: Data was collected from yearly summative conferences with the LPES administration.

By the end of the 2021-2022 school year, LPES experienced a more significant number of teachers leaving than in the preceding five years. While the main reasons for the transition varied, many high-quality teachers shared that deficient support contributed to their decision to leave LPES or the education field altogether. Beginning the 2022-2023 school year with 18 new certified teachers led to the need for additional mentors, training, supply funding, and time for capacity building. While much effort was focused on developing new staff, many students academically performed far below grade level due to the continued impacts of the pandemic. The need to support the retention of teachers was more significant than ever.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine the challenges presented to suburban elementary school teachers in the post-pandemic era and the impact of those challenges on their definition of support provided by elementary school leaders. The study also strived to combat the effect of these new challenges by developing perspectives on differentiated support structures for elementary teachers in a new teaching era. The purpose of this study was supported by research around three major themes: challenges through the perspective of suburban elementary teachers in the post-pandemic teaching era, definitions of support in an elementary setting after the year 2020, and different types of administrative support structures and their influence on teacher job satisfaction and working conditions.

Reflections and observations made by the researcher in the Spring of 2022 guided the formation of the research questions for this study. Why are teachers commenting on a lack of support as a reason to leave a position at LPES? What new challenges did the 21-22 school year pose that were not previously existent at LPES or the environment at large? How can support structures be altered to support the retention of teachers in the current day?

Research Questions

The following research questions were used to guide the investigation and draw conclusions from this action research study:

1. How do teachers in one suburban elementary school describe the comprehensive support needed in the post-pandemic era?
2. What is the impact of school leaders on suburban elementary teachers' self-efficacy and resilience?
3. How does the action research team describe the process of designing and implementing comprehensive support structures for teachers in one suburban elementary school?

The key terms in this action research study and related literature are clearly defined in the next section. While some definitions are set by standards outside of the environment presented in the study, others will be described within the context of Lucas Pointe Elementary School.

Definition of Terms

In the context of this study, the following terms are defined:

- "Burnout"- The National Education Association defines burnout as "a temporary condition in which an educator has exhausted the personal and professional resources necessary to do the job" (Walker, 2021).
- "Demoralization" is defined as teachers being unable to perform as they believe they should in aligning their morals due to constraints placed by policies, mandates, or institutional norms (Santoro, 2018).

- “Great Resignation” is the continued rise in the U.S. quit rate since the beginning of 2021. This rate is the highest percentage of people leaving the workforce since the 1970s (BLS, 2022).
- “Learning Loss” impacts student achievement at Lucas Pointe Elementary due to school closures, virtual/hybrid instruction, student and teacher absences, illness, emotional distress, and lack of equitable access to technology during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- “Pandemic” refers to the period between the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, which was declared a worldwide pandemic on March 11, 2020, and most countries recognized that the disease was transitioning to the endemic phase in November 2022. This period saw severe social and political unrest and the most significant global recession since the Great Depression (CDC, 2022).

Theoretical Framework

This action research aims to provide elementary school teachers experiencing stress with leadership through individualized support because overcoming a stressful circumstance leads to resilience and confidence to overcome future stressors. This research is founded on the transformational leadership and social support theories. The researcher adapted these theories to combine the transformational relationship between leader and follower, as described by Burns (1978), with the specific types of social support developed by House (1981).

The theory of transformational leadership developed by Burns (1978) changed the definition of leadership from strictly holding power to the ability of a leader to relate to a follower in a way that transformed their motivation towards reaching a shared vision. Moral

components were missing from the leadership landscape before Burns (1978) defined four elements of transformational leadership:

1. Idealized Influence – The leader acts as an ethical role model.
2. Inspirational Motivation - The leader articulates a clear vision that motivates the group towards common goals.
3. Intellectual Stimulation - The leader encourages creativity and encourages challenges to the status quo by seeking input.
4. Individualized Consideration - The leader studies the individual needs of the followers to support, coach, and celebrate.

The impact of the four elements on followers of transformational leaders makes them willing to work harder and develop self-efficacy (Burns, 1978). For this action research study, the researcher summarized these elements under influence, motivation, innovation, and individualization.

House (1981) described four types of support that lead to feelings of confidence when stressors arise in the workplace.

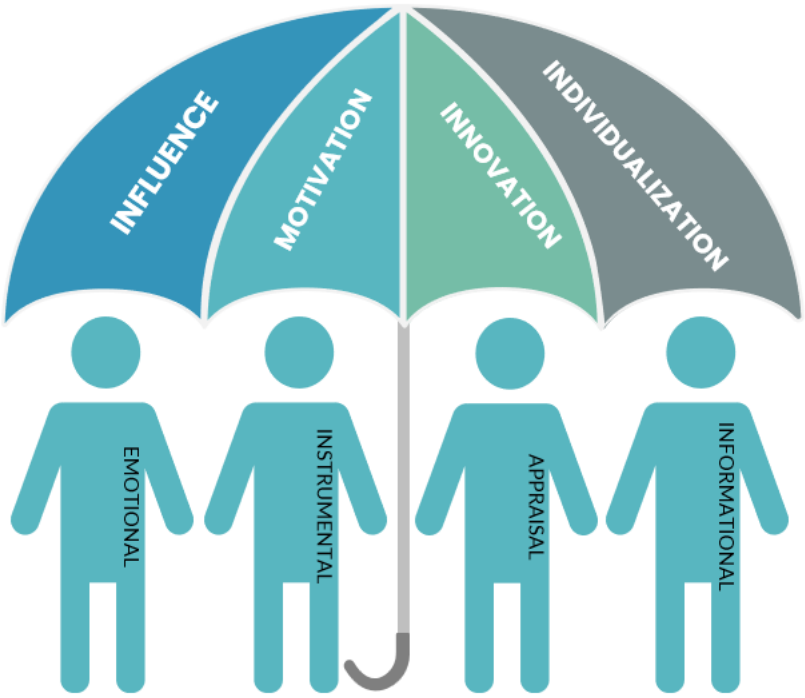
1. Emotional - showing compassion and empathy
2. Instrumental - providing material items or actions
3. Informational - providing information that can aid in decision-making
4. Appraisal - providing specific praise of skills or traits that lead to success

Cullen (1994) affirmed the work of House (1981) through the development of the social support theory. His research centered on the hypothesis that criminal delinquency in youth was due to a lack of adequate social support. In summary, he concluded that support from the surrounding community leads to confidence, reducing stress and the motivation to commit

crimes caused by feelings of isolation and hopelessness (Cullen, 1994). An elementary school operates similarly to a community, and teachers who experience high stress tend to burnout and leave the profession. For this action research study, the researcher specifically aligned the four types of social support defined by House (1981) with the individual consideration described by Burns (1978). Figure 1.2 depicts how transformational leadership acts as a shield against stressors when supporting followers with differentiated needs.

Figure 1.2

Theoretical Framework Based on Transformational Leadership and Social Support Theory



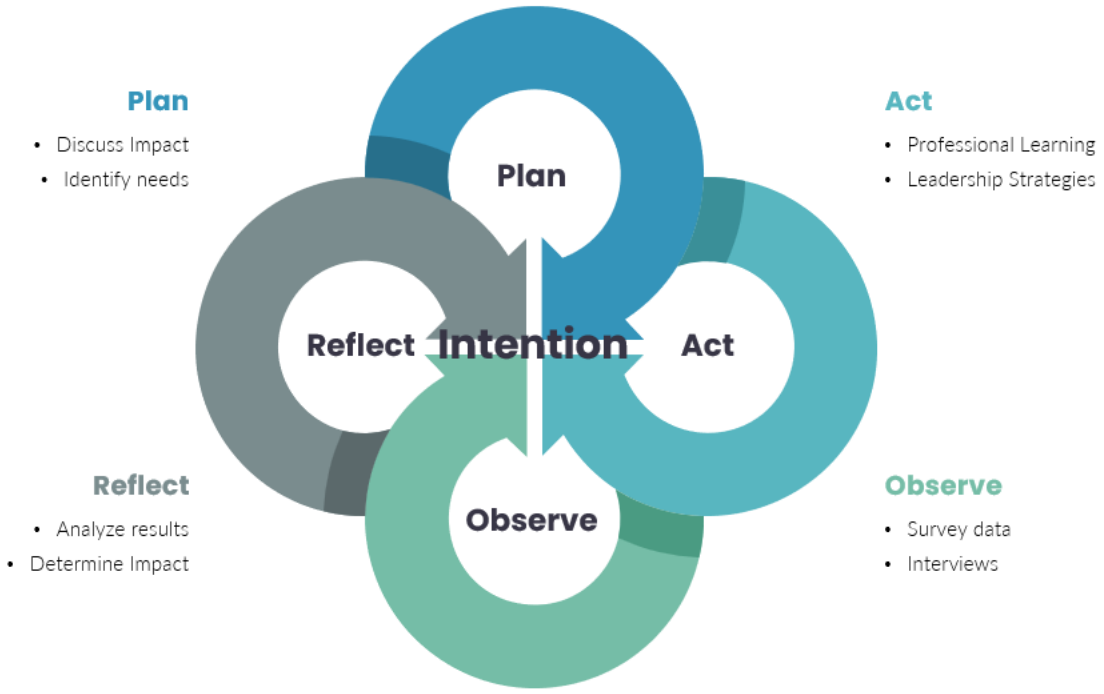
Logic Model

The logic model depicted in Figure 1.3 serves as a guide to examine how school leaders support and facilitate resilience and self-efficacy growth among the teachers in their departments. This model allows the administrator to develop school leaders during the plan, act,

and reflect phases. The school leaders will use new skills and strategies to support individual teachers on their team during the act and observe phases of the model.

Figure 1.3

Logic Model for Study



The logic model used in this study provides a collaborative support cycle for school department leaders, their peers, and an administrator. The cycle begins with a planning session to discuss identified problems and needed support. The administrator delivered professional learning aligned with leadership strategies and developed an action plan collaboratively with the implementation team to utilize during the following month. At the end of each cycle, the implementation team analyzed qualitative data to determine the effectiveness of the action plan. The administrator used this data to reflect on the impact of the school leader during the Act

phase of each cycle. Each school leader collaborated with peers during the Reflect phase to determine a new problem or clarify support needs during the next cycle.

Overview of the Methodology

The problem of practice at LPES was best investigated using action research due to the nature of the researcher's role within the school and investment in continuous improvement of service to the community. Investigating a system that a practitioner is directly involved in and that will seek to improve current practices within that system aligned with the action research themes: empowerment of participants, collaboration through participation, acquisition of knowledge, and social change (Zuber-Skerrit, 2002).

Kurt Lewin displayed his passion for improvement when he said, "Research that produces nothing but books will not suffice" (Lewin, 1946, p. 35). He is most widely noted for spreading the popularity of action research in the 1940s. However, Corey (1954) first applied the method to support teachers and supervisors in improvement practices in the 1950s (Glanz, 2014). Corey (1954) stated, "Action research in education is no more than attempting to solve practical school problems using research methods" (p. 379), which is most beneficial in the context of this study. In a literature review related to the broad field of action research, McKernan (1988) deduced, "action research is a root derivative of the scientific method" (p. 175). Simply stated, "Action research is a work in progress" (Brydon-Miller et al., 2003, p. 11).

Corey (1954) explained the difference between action research and traditional educational research by clarifying the motivation of the researcher, "a traditional educational researcher is motivated by his desire to arrive at the truth…those who engage in action research, are conducting their inquiries primarily because they wish to improve their own practices." Glanz (2014) further clarifies the differences by noting action research as "less

sophisticated…utilized by practitioners to solve problems…not generalizable to other groups or situations" (p. 17). This study incorporates teacher voices to understand their definition of support.

The study included an action research team that included a design and implementation team. The Action Research Design Team (ARDT) consisted of a retired Elementary principal, two assistant principals, one teacher leader, and a former Human Resources Induction specialist. The design team analyzed qualitative data to determine if staff members needed differentiated support. The researcher and ARDT developed an intervention to support engagement and retention that specifically supported the needs of LPES.

The Action Research Implementation Team (ARIT) included one administrator, six teacher leaders, and an instructional coach who implemented the action research cycles. Before beginning action research, the implementation team explored the possible impacts of role duality during the process. Coghlan (2019) advised considering how each team member processes insights gained through research based on their organizational role. The team also used literature and qualitative data to develop interventions that sought to improve the feeling of support described by teachers and their retention at LPES.

A collaborative problem-solving approach was most valuable to this study due to the difference in role between the researcher, an administrator, and the impacted subjects, teachers. Teacher perspectives as action research team participants led to deeper reflection and greater relevance when developing the intervention cycles. Coghlan (2019) framed this for participants by emphasizing, "Action research is a pragmatic co-creation of knowledge with, not about, people" (p. 5). The researcher relied on the thoughts of Bradbury (2001), who stated, "It's more satisfying for me to help create desired change, rather than merely observe life go by," to recruit

action research team members (Brydon-Miller et al., 2003, p. 20). The team members shared this mindset.

Several researchers believe that knowing comes from doing (Coghlan, 2019; Kemmis et al., 1990; Reason & Bradbury, 2001). Brydon-Miller et al. (2003) extended the theory by stating, "Action research is not merely about 'doing good,' it is also about doing things well" (p. 25). Inviting stakeholders to become part of the action research team brings relevance and opportunity for more critical analysis. Coghlan (2015) believed, "The powerful notion is that human systems could only be understood and changed if one involves the members of the system in the inquiry process itself" (p. 418).

When building the action research team, Holter and Schwartz-Barcott (1993) described a Technical-Collaborative type of action research, "The researcher identifies the problem and a specific intervention, then the practitioner is involved, and they agree to facilitate with the implementation of the intervention" (p. 301). LPEA teachers were not involved in identifying the initial problem at the school. However, the researcher interviewed them to define their challenges and the support they needed more clearly. The study was not designed to be generalized to any other context.

Data Collection

Data collection for this action research study involved several qualitative methods specifically selected to gain a thorough understanding of the experiences of both the participants and the implementation team. These methods included:

1. Individual Interviews with members of the implementation team before and after the research cycles;

2. Focus Group conducted with the implementation team at the start of each month and end of the study to gain perspectives about the process of differentiating support to elementary teachers;
3. Observations of department PLC meetings to collect research journal notes on the climate of the team, impact of the leader, and mindset of individual members;
4. Self-Assessment Rating Scales completed by individual teachers at the beginning and end of the study to determine any changes in resilience and self-efficacy factors;
5. Surveys were administered to individual teachers and school leaders at the beginning and end of the study to determine descriptions of support needed and capacity.

The researcher analyzed qualitative data using a coding scheme, which allowed for the identification of key themes and patterns. These patterns were further validated by triangulating them with quantitative data from rating scales.

Interventions

The primary intervention in this study was a professional learning community comprised of third--, fourth--, and fifth-grade level leaders, a special education department leader, an instructional coach, and the researcher. The team focused on providing differentiated support to individual members of each team based on their identified needs and building self-efficacy and resilience. The implementation team also participated in reflection sessions to build knowledge of different types of social support in the workplace. The ARDT created interventions comprised of a retired Elementary principal, two assistant principals, one teacher leader, and a former Human Resources Induction specialist. The team determined professional learning content during mid-month check-ins based on the needs and impact presented by the implementation team.

The design team planned three cycles of intervention, each lasting one month. The interventions included leadership development activities centered around identifying the needs of individual teachers on each team, providing differentiated social support based on the four types identified in the theoretical framework, and analyzing the results to determine the impact of said support.

Significance of the Study

Teachers faced many new challenges during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. While navigating unknowns and sudden shifts in operating procedures appeared to cause the most stress, less time, higher expectations, lower autonomy, and significant learning loss were reported as reasons teachers wanted to quit (GaDOE, 2022; Santoro, 2019). Many common structures for supporting teachers, including induction programs, mentoring, professional development, and collaborative PLCs, have shown a positive correlation with retention in the past (Doğan & Adams, 2018; Ingersoll, 2012). However, post-COVID-19 research suggested that teacher empowerment most strongly addressed the need for authentic relationships and open communication with school leaders (Erturk, 2021; Kiral, 2020). At the time of this study, building teacher resilience was vital due to intense political forces that continued to undermine the success building leaders have in positively impacting teachers (Babb et al., 2022). Current support structures can be enhanced by layering elements of transformational leadership and social support in the school building.

This action research study investigated the impact of differentiated social supports on the self-efficacy and resilience of elementary school teachers in one school. It was necessary to address the limited research on this topic during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. With an unprecedented number of teachers leaving the profession and even more showing interest in

leaving, research using teacher perceptions and current challenges to create differentiated supports is vital to developing current and future school leaders.

Organization of the Dissertation

This dissertation is organized into six chapters. Chapter 1 gives an overview of the study and situates the context for the problem of practice. The chapter also provides the research questions to be answered, defines key terms, and identifies the research design, methodology, and theoretical and conceptual frameworks that will structure the study. Chapter 2 reviews the related literature for the research and discusses the challenges facing teachers since the pandemic, how support is defined in an elementary setting, and current structures that seek to support teachers. Chapter 3 further describes the research design and methodology. This chapter also provides additional context in which the research was conducted.

Chapter 4 discusses the findings from this action research case within the study context. Chapter 5 presents the conclusions of the study as answers to the initial research questions. This chapter also analyzes the interventions conducted by the research team and notes patterns within the data. Chapter 6 summarizes connections from the research to possible recommendations for practitioners, researchers, policymakers, and further research. The chapter also extends the study limitations.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

Teacher retention was high on the discussion list in most school districts nationwide at the beginning of the 2022-23 school year. In a report published by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2022), the Great Resignation following the COVID-19 pandemic was attributed to the highest quit rate of all macroeconomic disruptions, with the highest rate of all existing in the southern United States (Amanor-Boadu, 2022). Teachers were not exempt from the Great Resignation and considered other opportunities outside of education (Mineo, 2022; Morrison, 2021; Rainey, 2022). Specifically, the number of public educators who chose to resign during and since the pandemic was more than 1.7 million.

The number of people looking to join the education workforce is even more concerning, with only about half as many hires as job openings in the 21-22 school year (BLS, 2022). Administrative teams, students, and communities felt the impact. Some research states that the loss of control over the teaching environment, increased policies that limit teacher autonomy, and exhaustion from increased workload topped the list of stressors that led to many deciding to leave the profession (Christian-Brandt et al., 2020; Ryan et al., 2017). Strategies for supporting and retaining high-quality teachers became a high priority for administrators.

The purpose of this study was to determine the challenges presented to suburban elementary school teachers in the post-pandemic era and the impact of those challenges on their definition of support provided by elementary school leaders. The study also strived to combat the effect of these new challenges by developing perspectives on differentiated support structures for

elementary teachers in a new teaching era. The purpose of this study was supported by research around three major themes: challenges through the perspective of suburban elementary teachers in the post-pandemic teaching era, definitions of support in an elementary setting after the year 2020, and different types of administrative support structures and their influence on teacher job satisfaction and working conditions.

Reflections and observations made by the researcher in the Spring of 2022 guided the formation of the research questions for this study. Why are teachers commenting on a lack of support as a reason to leave a position at LPES? What new challenges did the 21-22 school year pose that were not previously existent at LPES or the environment at large? How can support structures be altered to support the retention of teachers in the current day?

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3. How does the action research team describe the process of designing and implementing comprehensive support structures for teachers in one suburban elementary school?

This literature review is divided into three main parts. The researcher analyzed recent research related to challenges felt by teachers in the post-pandemic era, defining support in an elementary setting, and commonly used support structures.

This study strived to combat the impact of the Great Resignation by developing a perspective on building support structures for elementary teachers in a new teaching era.

Challenges of the Post-Pandemic Teaching Era

Many studies have been conducted on teacher attrition rates and the outlook of the profession. For decades before the pandemic, federal data showed that eight percent of teachers leave the profession yearly (Loewus, 2021). In March 2021, Education Week and Roadtrip Nation conducted a study that surveyed 700 teachers and 300 school leaders to determine their future intentions and the reasons behind their decisions. The results were comparatively different from past findings of eight percent. A striking 33% of educators in the study reported they were "very likely" to leave the profession in the next two years. Only 27% were "very unlikely" to leave. Education Week and Roadtrip Nation conducted the same survey in 2019, before the pandemic, and reported that 13% of educators were "very likely" to leave and 47% were "very likely" to stay (Loewus, 2021). Recognizing a 20% shift in two years from very unlikely to very likely calls for an investigation of the challenges presented to teachers during that period and beyond.

Kwon et al. (2022) studied challenging working conditions and the well-being of early childhood teachers. While in-person and virtual teachers were included in the study, the respondents teaching in person are most valuable to this literature review. The most frequently reported challenge was the difficulty working with young children while wearing masks, social distancing, and taking many breaks for hand washing. This was coupled with fears of becoming infected by lower-risk children (Kwon et al., 2022). New safety measures and protocols added additional tasks to the logistical to-do list of in-person teachers. These protocols were so often

changed that teachers “were never certain of what to expect the next day” (Kwon et al., 2022, p. 10).

Jae Lee, principal of Carderock Elementary School in Montgomery County, claimed, “One of the biggest challenges is how different people will respond and react to the unknown” (ASCD, 2020, para. 2). Uncertainty can be emotionally, mentally, and physically challenging. Additionally, the study found “that aspects of professional commitment were lower among those teachers teaching in person” (Kwon et al., 2022, p. 1). The challenges presented were primarily unique to the period immediately following the pandemic. With the day-to-day impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic diminishing, many districts were ready to return to “normal.” However, this study concludes, “this does not absolve the field from ensuring that teachers are better prepared in the future to meet unique needs, whether pandemic-related or otherwise” (Kwon et al., 2022, p. 19).

The subsequent two studies will review literature from a more expansive time frame. In 2022, the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) commissioned a task force of fourteen top teachers in Georgia to determine the root causes of the increased teacher attrition statewide. They used related essential research to develop the background and participated in statewide discussions that elevated teacher voices. The task force reported significant findings in five areas: Assessment, Preserving and Protecting Time, Pressures/Unrealistic Expectations, Teacher Voice and Professional Growth, and Mental Health and Wellness (GaDOE, 2022). Santoro (2019) defined teacher burnout as “nothing more to give” (para. 19). This suggests that each teacher had an unknown expiration date for school leaders and was depletable. The GaDOE teacher burnout study (2022) used two research questions to center the task force.

- What do you believe are factors contributing to teacher burnout in Georgia as the result of the pandemic?
- What do you believe are factors contributing to teacher burnout in Georgia as a result of policies and procedures initiated at the school/system/state level?

Five themes emerged from the discussions around these questions.

1. High-stakes testing requirements had been reduced, but district-level tests had increased.
2. When academic recovery is essential, planning time is filled with meetings, making the workload impossible and exhausting.
3. Teacher workload was not mitigated as the expectations returned to pre-pandemic levels.
4. Teachers lack a voice and autonomy in decision-making for the classroom.
5. Teacher stress levels increased among students and families during the pandemic.

Doris Santoro, a professor at Bowdoin College, researched current challenges for educators over ten years. In 2018, in conjunction with the Harvard Education Press, she published *Demoralized: Why Teachers Leave the Profession They Love and How They Can Stay*. In contrast to the GaDOE (2022) Teacher Burnout study, Santoro concluded that current challenges in education are demoralizing teachers. “When teachers talk about leaving the profession, they are commonly described as “burnt out.” But for many, the real story is that they have moral objections to school policies and practices” (Santoro, 2019, para. 1).

Santoro (2018) shared many examples of challenges teachers experienced, including being encouraged to use inequitable and, at times, unethical assessment practices, the pressures caused by media portraying education in a negative light, district-wide curriculum mandates that

do not match student academic needs, removal of teacher autonomy in assessment and instructional design, and shunning of critical questions were just a few. Santoro (2018) shared sentiments from a teacher who felt that her district prioritized procedural compliance over deep learning. The teacher research participants responded to the challenges in three ways.

1. Quit up- become a school leader
2. Leave the profession as a silent protest – I won't do wrong by students
3. Comply and stay in a state of "moral madness" (Santoro, 2019, para. 33)

Walker (2021) noted the challenges presented in the current teaching landscape. "Burnout is often a more temporary condition in which an educator has exhausted the personal and professional resources necessary to do the job. Demoralization occurs when an educator believes she is unable to perform the work in ways that uphold the high standards of the profession" (Walker, 2021, para. 9). Whether caused by the pandemic, burnout, or demoralization, the combination of challenges that teachers face profoundly affects the future of the education field.

A common thread linking all three categories is a perception by teachers that their voice has not had a part in the many overarching decisions made by school leaders during this period. Whether in school board policies, COVID-19 protocols, assessment of students, curriculum resources, or schedules, teachers felt a lack of autonomy to make decisions that best met the needs of their students. Have school leaders figuratively tied their hands? What do teachers need to feel capable, supported, and morally aligned with their work? The next section of this literature review will look for a more explicit definition of support through the teacher's lens.

Support Through the Teacher Lens

The definition of the word support has many layers. Support as a verb is associated with encouraging, helping, providing, proving, accepting, and stopping from falling. The noun version

for support is defined as encouragement, help, money, and proof (Britannica, 2022). Both definitions align to want someone or something to succeed. In an elementary school, the goal of support is the success of teachers and, ultimately, students. The research included in this section will reveal elements of support gleaned from teacher feedback. Many require a shift in thinking from the administrator lens to implement.

When discussing support, it is essential to acknowledge the significant shifts in determining teacher success since 2020. Reitman (2019) interviewed 60 teachers in a suburban setting and sought to answer the question, “What kind of support is most effective in helping teachers to remain in the teaching profession?” (p. 1). The district had utilized compensated “support providers” to assist teachers in their first few years of teaching. All participants in the study were still teaching after 16 years and recognized the positive impact of significant support on their decision to stay. Interviews brought out common thoughts on what made the support beneficial. Developing individual relationships with mentors, having access to pedagogical training, continued professional learning, and opportunities to reflect all pointed to a key to supporting and ultimately retaining these teachers (Reitman, 2019).

In contrast, the support described in research published after the pandemic in 2020 points to the structures and vision set by administrators as the foundation needed (Blanchet, 2022; Santoro, 2021). Emotional well-being supports have been at the forefront of feedback from teachers since 2020. Blanchet (2022) attributed teacher disengagement to a change in support. The findings from the research shared that the non-tangible traits of care, optimism, confidence, curiosity, and vulnerability when nurtured, produce engagement. Specific steps all began with the recommendation of opening conversations with teachers to understand their feelings.

Santoro (2021) agreed with the findings of Blanchet (2022) and reported teacher dissatisfaction in her brief for EdResearch for Recovery, a project targeting best practices and topics of discussion in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Strategies to consider moving forward pointed to the need for administrators to open conversations that build an understanding of teacher experiences and perspectives. While personalizing professional learning and including teachers in the decision-making process have remained a priority since 2020, new insights emerged around creating a mindfulness culture to reduce stress, protect teachers' time, and commit to social and racial justice to affirm educators' identities. In a survey across the US in October 2020, lack of administrative support was given as one of the top predictors of burnout (Pressley, 2021). The pandemic accelerated teacher burnout and demoralization.

> Seventy-five percent of National Board Certified teachers reported working more hours post-COVID, with 20% working more than 15 extra hours a week compared to pre-COVID…As the primary contact for parents, teachers serve as the conduit for explaining controversial decisions made at the district and school level and often receive the brunt of criticism, which can be emotionally draining (Santoro, 2021, p. 3).

Santoro (2021) also reported clear communication, celebrating progress, fostering a concentrated collaboration culture, and autonomy as supports administrators should provide to promote teacher well-being and job satisfaction. Santoro (2018) also supported these findings.

The brunt of changes regarding the support of teachers falls on the administrator. It is essential to ask the question, when can the support defined by teachers harm the success of students? Researchers in a study published for the Public Health Emergency Covid-19 Initiative (2022) investigated how social networks impacted teacher stress levels, which showed an interesting correlation. Teachers reported a substantial similarity between the people they

connected with for support at work and their emotional well-being. In short, they commonly defined their stress level in the same ways as their support peers (Kaihoi, 2022). This finding should be considered when designing support structures. Can perceived support feed job dissatisfaction? Schwanke (2018) challenged administrators to rethink the support of teachers through the following definition:

> Support doesn't mean blind loyalty, defending things that are wrong, or refusing to acknowledge mistakes, missteps, or negligence. It does not mean "shield" or "corroborate" or "implicate." And it certainly doesn't mean taking the blame for someone else's errors…Being supportive means being the clear-eyed leader, the one who has broad perspective and can see all sides of every story. Support means offering a framework to help teachers be their best. It means challenging the way things have always been done, and offering new approaches, and being a relentless advocate for students (Schwanke, 2018, para. 2).

When developing support, it is essential to be open and understand teacher experiences without mindlessly focusing on teacher desires and forgetting the first goal of education: student success.

The definition of support for elementary teachers in the post-pandemic era needed to be more concrete. The literature reviewed pointed to a less structured support approach where the foundation is built on authentic relationships and clear communication between teachers and administrators. Developing a system to understand, acknowledge, and improve teacher engagement and job satisfaction without compromising student well-being and progress will be a considerable feat for school leaders. Reviewing current structures in place for supporting teachers is essential before making changes to a system.

Structures for Support in an Elementary Setting

The most common structured supports for teachers are new teacher induction programs, professional development opportunities, and professional learning communities. Formalized induction programs escalated when most states implemented policies that required specific support for new teachers. By 2008, more than 90% of first-year teachers participated in an induction program (Ingersoll, 2012). Ronfeldt and McQueen (2017) found that induction support during the first year of teaching lowered migration and attrition rates. A supportive and beneficial induction program comprises an assigned mentor, seminar participation, common planning time, and supportive communication with administration or department chairs.

While induction programs support the transition of early career teachers from formalized schooling, professional development is "any activity that is intended partly or primarily to prepare staff members for improved performance in present or future roles" (Little, 1987, p. 491). Osman and Warner (2020) described these activities as structured in-service training, co-teaching, observations, book clubs, peer observations, instructional rounds, action research, or discussions. Their research stated that the effectiveness of professional development must be measured by the impact on teacher motivation calculated through answering the following questions: Do they feel they can be successful in implementing, what is the perceived cost to their practice, and what value does it add to their instruction?

"A professional learning community is a group of professionals working collaboratively towards a shared purpose of improvement in instruction and student learning through dialogue" (Doğan & Adams, 2018, p. 636). The collaboration supports the improved practice of each member by embarking on a cyclical journey through data analysis, strategic planning, implementing strategies, and reflection. When time is allocated for the collective work of PLCs,

teacher learning accelerates, and the negative impacts of isolation decrease. “Students benefit when teachers participate in PLCs” (Doğan & Adams, 2018, p. 655). By supporting teacher collaboration through a PLC structure, administrators can see an impact on student achievement.

Compared to standard support within a concrete framework, how teachers perceive support from their administrators is more complex. Erturk (2021) divided the supportive behaviors provided by administrators into four main categories: emotional (care), appraisal (feedback), instrumental (provision), and professional (information). For these things, there is no formula or checklist to follow. These are also not things that can be automated or delegated to teacher leaders and coaches. Erturk (2021) concluded that there is a positive relationship between these behaviors and job satisfaction and well-being. In addition to the direct support administrators provide teachers, Kiral (2020) suggested that school administrators are integral in supporting teacher empowerment, which increases teacher job satisfaction, organizational commitment, motivation, and a sense of belonging. Kiral (2020) studied five dimensions of empowerment:

1. Delegation of Authority - transferring power to teachers
2. Administrative Support - professional, personal, and environmental support for achieving objectives
3. Participation in Decision Making - involving teachers’ opinions in the decisions regarding the school
4. Teamwork - bringing people with different skills together to benefit each other
5. Communication - establishing a channel of communication that is honest, positive, optimistic, thoughtful, and tolerant

The highest correlations existed between organizational commitment and empowerment dimensions: three (participation in decision-making) and five (communication). The support behaviors in both studies rely on the administrator building an authentic relationship.

Power, Policy, Politics, and the Impact on Teacher Resilience

National and international teachers who left the profession after the COVID-19 pandemic were a part of the Great Resignation. Rising teacher attrition rates have been a concern in the state for which this study occurred since 2015. Between 2008 and 2015, the attrition rate grew to 44% (Henson et al., 2015). The 2022 Professional Association of Georgia Educators Legislative Survey found that "approximately 31% of all responding educators report that they are unlikely or highly unlikely to remain in education for another five years" (PAGE, 2022, p. 6). A post-COVID-19 pandemic United Kingdom teacher study conveyed similar findings, with twice as many teachers reporting intentions to leave the profession (Fullard, 2021). After the pandemic, national and international teachers considered other opportunities outside of the education field (Morrison, 2021; Rainey, 2022).

In 2022, the Georgia Department of Education commissioned a task force to determine the root causes of the increased teacher attrition statewide. The task force reported significant findings in five areas: Assessment, Preserving and Protecting Time, Pressures/Unrealistic Expectations, Teacher Voice and Professional Growth, and Mental Health and Wellness (GaDOE, 2022). A letter from the 2022 Georgia Teacher of the Year, Cherie Bonder Goldman, implored readers to reflect on the voices represented in the report. She told school leaders, "The teachers I know don't want to walk away…But too many of our teachers are running on empty. We cannot change how we got here, but we can change how we go forward."

Many researchers used the term “burnout” to address the problem of teacher retention (ASCD, 2020; GaDOE, 2022; New York Teacher, 2019; Rajendran et al., 2020). Some have taken offense to label teachers as “burned out” and have redefined the cause of attrition as teacher demoralization (Mineo, 2022; Santoro, 2018; Santoro, 2020). Others in the field blame the loss of control over the teaching environment, increased policies that limit teacher autonomy, and exhaustion from an increased workload (Christian-Brandt et al., 2020; Ryan et al., 2017). Regardless of the term used to describe what is happening in education, teacher resilience is declining rapidly, and research points to elements beyond their control as a cause. The following section will review current literature on the impact of assessment and accountability policies and what school leaders can do to provide protective factors and support that increase resilience.

Assessment and Accountability

In 2022, the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) commissioned a task force of fourteen top teachers in Georgia to determine the root causes of the increased teacher attrition statewide. They used related fundamental research to develop the background and participated in discussions that elevated teacher voices around the state. The GaDOE (2022) teacher burnout study used two research questions to center the task force.

- What do you believe are factors contributing to teacher burnout in Georgia as the result of the pandemic?
- What do you believe are factors contributing to teacher burnout in Georgia as a result of policies and procedures initiated at the school/system/state level?

Five themes emerged from the discussions about these questions. The consistent themes among the participating teachers included:

1. High-stakes testing requirements had been reduced, but district-level tests had increased.
2. When academic recovery is essential, planning time is filled with meetings, making the workload impossible and exhausting.

Similarly, Ryan et al. (2017) investigated the relationship between assessment, accountability policies, and teacher turnover. While teacher experience and school climate were also considered factors impacting teacher turnover, there were significant correlations between pressures from accountability measures and teacher attrition. “Manifestations of testing stress positively predicted both types of attrition, suggesting that higher physiological or behavioral symptoms of stress were linked with higher rates of teacher migration and leaving the teaching profession” (Ryan et al., 2017, p. 8). The study noted that teacher experience decreased teacher attrition. Recommendations for policymakers related to assessment accountability included creating teacher training programs more closely linked to a realistic view of the profession and considering the direct effects of test-based accountability and teacher stress and attrition.

Santoro (2019) defined teacher burnout as “nothing more to give” (p. 30). This would suggest that each teacher has an unknown expiration date to school leaders and is depletable. Santoro (2018) offered an alternative to the commonly used term “teacher burnout” by describing demoralization as teachers unable to perform as they believe they should in aligning their morals due to constraints placed by policies, mandates, or institutional norms. Santoro (2018) notes that most practitioners go into the teaching profession to make a difference in the lives of their students. When constraints prevent them from doing everything they believe they should to impact students, the urge to resign becomes intense. She cautions that students suffer when teachers are struggling with demoralization.

Wronowski (2021) led two studies using multiple teacher perception surveys to find relationships between accountability policies in the mid-2000s and how teachers felt about demoralization and de-professionalization. The research reviewed the relationship between standardized testing policies and their impact on autonomous teaching practices. When the findings indicated perceptions of demoralization, teacher turnover increased with statistical significance. However, when teachers perceived de-professionalization, teacher turnover was not impacted.

In addition to teacher attrition, many researchers have noted an impact on self-efficacy (Christian-Brandt et al., 2020; Ryan et al., 2017). A study by Gonzalez (2016) depicts teacher job-related accountability stressors and their impact on teacher self-efficacy. Much of the reviewed research was related to the stress imposed by state-mandated testing on students without support resources and on teachers trying to implement appropriate curricula to support them (Gonzalez, 2016). Findings revealed that teachers with high-stakes testing subject matter experienced more job-related stress. This stress also decreased their self-efficacy. A lack of time was also noted in teachers instructing high-stakes testing subjects. They felt they could not implement the curriculum to fidelity due to the pressure to meet the testing demands. Alternatively, administrators who valued teachers as contributing team members increased self-efficacy.

Darling-Hammond and Hyler (2020) called for action from policymakers after the COVID-19 pandemic. With one in five educators reporting that they will not return to the education field due to the demands created by the learning loss of students, accountability pressures, and their own social-emotional needs, many recommendations were given to remedy the potential crisis. At the top of the list was adapting current educator preparation programs to

match the needs of the post-pandemic school system (Ryan et al., 2017). Darling-Hammond and Hyler (2020) also noted that educators must know how to use formative assessments. Providing appropriate support to teachers in new roles and creating structures for authentic peer collaboration are also recommended.

Birchinal et al. (2019) outline a study on mindfulness interventions and their impact on pre-service teacher stress. Systemic pressures of accountability, public policy, and teacher responsibilities are notable causes of teacher stress (Birchinal et al., 2019; Kangas-Dick & O'Shaughnessy, 2020). Substantial costs to school systems and students come in the form of mental health absences and learning loss. Evidence is presented to link stress reduction and mindfulness interventions. The ability to adapt positively when a situation is negative shows resilience. Kangas-Dick and O'Shaughnessy (2020) also linked some mindfulness interventions to teacher resilience when working in challenging environments.

Leadership Practices

As a leader, supporting teachers to prevent burnout should be a top priority, but understanding how can be complicated. Babb et al. (2020) conducted a study during the COVID-19 pandemic with Canadian teachers. The purpose was to determine the possible association between teacher burnout and resources that impact exhaustion, cynicism, and a sense of accomplishment. The researcher hypothesized that factors correlated with demands placed by stakeholders outside of the classroom, such as parents, expectations of administrators, and a lack of resources, would have the highest impact on the sense of achievement.

Surprisingly, the factors that indicated the highest sense of accomplishment and lowest levels of burnout were exercise, healthy eating, meditation, prayer, and mindfulness. Also noted was the finding that "support from administrators is significant at all stages of teacher burnout"

(Babb et al., 2020, p. 73). Over three years, the researcher observed, in a different role, the many benefits of a school district extending intensive mindfulness professional learning experiences to teachers. Administrators see the impact of accountability practices on teachers' well-being yet understand the necessity for measuring student growth.

Considering how to support during these difficult times and proactively build teacher resilience for what could come, guidance is sought from how Babb et al. (2020) built upon their research in 2022 by studying the influence of transformational leadership on teacher resilience. The researchers detailed the struggle of power differentials between school leaders and elementary teachers after the COVID-19 pandemic (Babb et al., 2020). The research sought to identify teachers' well-being levels and the support they needed. Participants reported high levels of stress induced by additional tasks from the administration. A feeling of job ambiguity and unclear expectations compounded this finding.

The research sought to determine if there was a link between job satisfaction and resources such as efficacy, connectedness, and autonomy. The results concluded that teacher resilience increased when more power was returned to the teacher through autonomy, emotional support, and teaching efficacy. Chan et al. (2021) found a similar correlation between leadership practices and the psychological health of teachers. A sudden shift in job demands placed on teachers by policymakers during the pandemic caused increased pressure to perform roles beyond standard teaching practices. This caused a role conflict, and teachers could not access support to navigate the challenges.

The study by Chan et al. (2021) showed that insufficient resources to meet the new demands was a significant source of teachers feeling demoralized and contributing to burnout. The research also noted that the increase in health and safety job demands of administrators

reduced time for supporting teachers. The findings in the study also determined that the leadership practices that had the most impact on well-being were creating a sense of belonging for teachers and providing increased autonomy. Implications for school leaders also included reducing teacher workload and providing role clarity to increase self-efficacy.

Chapter Summary

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers have faced many new challenges. In the literature reviewed, navigating unknowns and sudden shifts in operating procedures seem to cause the most stress. The themes reported throughout the research were less time, higher expectations, lower autonomy, and significant learning loss, leading to many teachers feeling ready to quit. Many researchers described these feelings as exhaustion or burnout, while others blamed demoralization, a misalignment between personal and professional values and beliefs, and organizational policies.

Many common structures for supporting teachers, including induction programs, mentoring, professional development, and collaborative PLCs, have positively correlated with retention. However, the research describing teacher empowerment most strongly addresses the need for authentic relationships and open communication with administrators, as teachers have expressed since the pandemic. Building teacher resilience is vital because even when leaders are "Successfully invoking changes over time with the intention of producing positive outcomes for teachers, the interplay of political forces persist in destabilizing the system at both individual and organizational levels" (Babb et al., 2022, p. 70). Current structures of support can be enhanced by layering these transformational leadership practices.

Research on supports linked to reversing the feeling of demoralization and structures for enhancing time for collaboration and planning was missing from the literature reviewed.

Research would also benefit from determining clear boundaries that define excessive support that could be detrimental to the development or retention of teachers. With an unprecedented number of teachers leaving the profession and even more showing interest in leaving soon, administrators must use the perceptions of teachers and current challenges to create differentiated supports that address the needs of their staff.

Chapter 3 describes the action research methodology and design and delves into the study context. The chapter also includes the methods used to collect data, interventions implemented, and an overview of data analysis.

CHAPTER 3

ACTION RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to determine the challenges presented to suburban elementary school teachers in the post-pandemic era and the impact of those challenges on their definition of support provided by elementary school leaders. The study also strived to combat the effect of these new challenges by developing perspectives on differentiated support structures for elementary teachers in a new teaching era. The purpose of this study was supported by research around three major themes: challenges through the perspective of suburban elementary teachers in the post-pandemic teaching era, definitions of support in an elementary setting after the year 2020, and different types of administrative support structures and their influence on teacher job satisfaction and working conditions.

Reflections and observations made by the researcher in the Spring of 2022 guided the formation of the research questions for this study. Why are teachers commenting on a lack of support as a reason to leave a position at LPES? What new challenges did the 21-22 school year pose that were not previously existent at LPES or the environment at large? How can support structures be altered to support the retention of teachers in the current day?

The following research questions were used to guide the investigation and draw conclusions from this action research study:

1. How do teachers in one suburban elementary school describe the comprehensive support needed in the post-pandemic era?

2. What is the impact of school leaders on suburban elementary teachers' self-efficacy and resilience?
3. How does the action research team describe the process of designing and implementing comprehensive support structures for teachers in one suburban elementary school?

Rationale for Qualitative Research Design

Early anthropologists and sociologists first popularized qualitative research, which is still commonly used in education today. A qualitative design involves studying people in their environments and interpreting their experiences (Bloomberg, 2023; Glanz, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Piaget (1936) primarily used qualitative research to develop his theory about the cognitive development of children, which is widely used in education. He began by studying his children, constructing meaning through his observations of them.

Four main characteristics define qualitative research. A process is used to understand the participants and context, the researcher acts as the primary data collector, no hypothesis is predetermined before the research begins, and the outcome yields highly descriptive findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Qualitative research uses "words as data" (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 3). Qualitative researchers are interested in how people interpret their experiences, construct their worlds, and attribute meaning to their experiences (Glanz, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Glanz (2014) also declared, "Research is a major professional responsibility of any educational leader. Research…is reflection in action" (p. 4, 25).

During the literature review grounding this study, much support was revealed for using a qualitative approach. A recent quantitative analysis of the correlation between supportive behaviors by administrators and the well-being of teachers recommended, "Qualitative research

may be conducted to explore the opinions of both teachers and school administrators about school administrators' support to teachers" (Erturk, 2021, p. 192). Babb et al. (2022) brought forth transformational leadership practices that promoted resilience. In post-study reflection, they noted, "We believe that the qualitative case study approach selected to present this research offered insights which would allow readers to reconstruct knowledge in a manner that is personally applicable to their context" (Babb, 2022, p. 71). After analyzing the quantitative data collected in a study of social support provided to teachers, Kaihoi (2022) pointed out, "An important extension of this work would be exploring in more detail the form of stress support sought out from colleagues" (p. 1082). The Action Research Implementation Team (ARIT) used the qualitative research design at Lucas Pointe Elementary to pursue the details described by Kaihoi (2022).

The purpose of this study was to determine the challenges presented to suburban elementary school teachers in the post-pandemic era and the impact of those challenges on their definition of support provided by elementary school leaders. The study also strived to combat the effect of these new challenges by developing perspectives on differentiated support structures for elementary teachers in a new teaching era. Qualitative research endorsed the construction of new understanding and knowledge from the experiences of the ARIT. In this study, descriptive data on individual perspectives was necessary to understand how participants perceived support and the implications of the intervention.

This action research study involved several qualitative data collection methods specifically selected to gain a thorough understanding of the ARIT and participant experiences. These methods included interviews, observations, anecdotal notes, and surveys. The ARIT used

the data to investigate the connections between differentiating support and the perceived self-efficacy and resilience of teachers participating in the study.

Overview of Action Research Methods

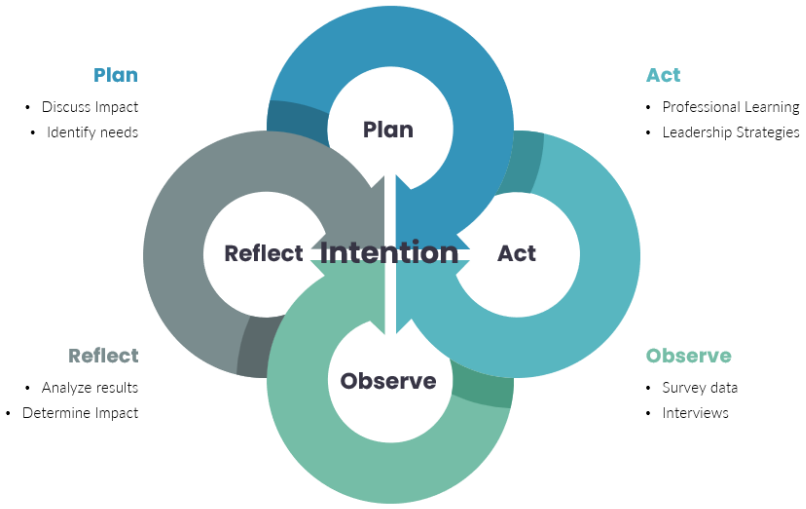
Kurt Lewin is most widely noted for spreading the popularity of action research in the 1940s. However, Corey (1954) first applied the method to support teachers and supervisors in improvement practices in the 1950s (Glanz, 2014). Corey (1954) stated, “Action research in education is no more than attempting to solve practical school problems using research methods” (p. 379), which is most beneficial in the context of this study. In qualitative action research, the researcher seeks to involve the participants in problem-solving (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Zuber-Skerrit, 2002).

The researcher worked alongside the participants to analyze data and create meaning from perspectives to determine the process and impact of providing differentiated support. The collaboration aligned with the constructivist paradigm of action research. Bloomberg (2023) described the role of the action researcher in this qualitative research paradigm as needing “to understand the multiple realities from the perspectives of participants” (p. 78). The ARIT understood that the context of this study and the unique background of each participant required careful consideration when constructing meaning from the data.

All forms of action research share common principles that make up the process. Action research begins by defining a problem of practice. The lead researcher determines their role in the organization and works closely with participants to plan, act, and analyze multiple forms of data in a cyclical format (Glanz, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The action research implementation team adapted these principles into the Logic Model in Figure 3.1.

Figure 3.1

Logic Model for Action Research



The logic model used in this study provided a collaborative support cycle for school department leaders, which included their peers and an administrator as co-investigators. This collaborative approach was best used throughout the action research cycles to plan, act, observe, and reflect on multiple forms of data.

This action research study aimed to provide leadership through individualized support to elementary school teachers experiencing stress. Investigating a system that a research practitioner is directly involved in and that will seek to improve current practices within that system aligned with the action research themes: Empowerment of participants, collaboration through participation, acquisition of knowledge, and social change (Zuber-Skerrit, 2002). This study incorporated teacher voice as a critical component in understanding their definition of support. The following section details the interventions collaboratively created by the Action Research Design Team (ARDT) to determine the impacts of differentiated support on teacher resilience.

Interventions

Action research develops over time through the reflection and planning of an ARDT. Coghlan (2019) defined an intervention as “doing or saying something that alters the status quo” (p. 191). Glanz (2014) described an intervention as “a practice, program, or procedure that is implemented by a researcher in order to investigate its effect on the behavior or achievement of an individual or group” (p. 64). Categorized this way in educational action research, interventions are the same as treatments applied in other contexts of action research (Glanz, 2014). Engagement with participants supports designing interventions by understanding the context and the people involved in the study. As the interventions unfold, the researcher studies the effects (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The researcher conducted three intervention cycles, each occurring over one month, to deepen understanding of the system in which the action research occurred. Each intervention cycle and evaluation worked to inform future actions of the ARIT (Bloomberg, 2023).

The initial purpose of this study was to determine the challenges presented to suburban elementary school teachers in the post-pandemic era and the impact of those challenges on their definition of support provided by elementary school leaders. The study also strived to combat the effect of these new challenges by developing interventions to differentiate support structures for elementary teachers in a new teaching era.

Comparing literature before and after the pandemic showed an increased need for personalized professional support, open communication with leaders, and affirmation of educators. With increased policy and societal pressures, more teachers could not align the morals behind their teaching practices with school demands (Santoro, 2018). School demands shifted towards focusing on emotionally intelligent leaders with an innovative vision of support. School

administrators play an integral part in supporting teacher empowerment, which increases teacher job satisfaction, organizational commitment, motivation, and a sense of belonging (Erturk, 2021; Kiral, 2020). Teacher resilience increases when more power is returned to the teacher through autonomy, emotional support, and teaching efficacy (Babb et al., 2022). Transformational leadership practices can influence teacher resilience (Babb et al., 2022). The researcher developed interventions described in this study to investigate the impact on teacher resilience and self-efficacy.

The intervention components included in this study took place in a four-part cycle of leadership development activities centered around identifying the needs of individual teachers on each team, providing differentiated social support based on the four types identified in the theoretical framework, and reflecting on the impact of said support by analyzing results. The ARIT members held the roles of third-, fourth-, and fifth-grade-level leaders, a special education department leader, one instructional coach, and the researcher.

Defining the Needs

Before interventions began, the researcher conducted pre-cycle interviews with ARIT members to determine their perspectives on current challenges with supporting teachers. The researcher also collected relevant data to support the ARIT in defining the needs of their team members through a survey. The first cycle began with a data review session to discuss the areas of opportunity and support the elementary teachers identified.

Building Capacity

The first intervention took the form of monthly professional learning sessions to build the capacity of the ARIT to provide differentiated support to their team members. The ARDT designed professional learning content during mid-month check-ins based on the needs presented

by the ARIT. The ARDT selected facilitators to deliver aligned professional learning to the teacher leaders and coaches related to applying the four types of social support.

Application of Support

The second intervention involved the ARIT applying the strategies gained during professional learning over three weeks. ARIT members all held leadership roles incorporating consistent weekly collaboration and continuous communication with their team members each month. The researcher gave each ARIT member a leadership notebook to record relevant data, applicable shared resources, and reflection notes. Providing this type of differentiated support to team members was most successful when the ARIT members also practiced timely reflection and communication with other ARIT members during the application period.

Reflecting to Improve

The researcher held monthly focus group meetings with the ARIT to analyze observational data and discuss the perceived impact of providing differentiated support to team members. The knowledge gained from ARIT participants influenced the course of the study.

Table 3.1

Intervention Components for the Study

Framework Link	Intervention	Target Group	Frequency
Influence	Building Capacity	ARIT	Monthly
Individualization	Defining the Needs	Teacher Participants	Initial
Innovation	Application of Support	Teacher Participants	Ongoing
Motivation	Reflecting to Improve	ARIT	Monthly

The ARIT collected data associated with the interventions described in this section. The researcher then analyzed qualitative methods, including developing codes and defining themes.

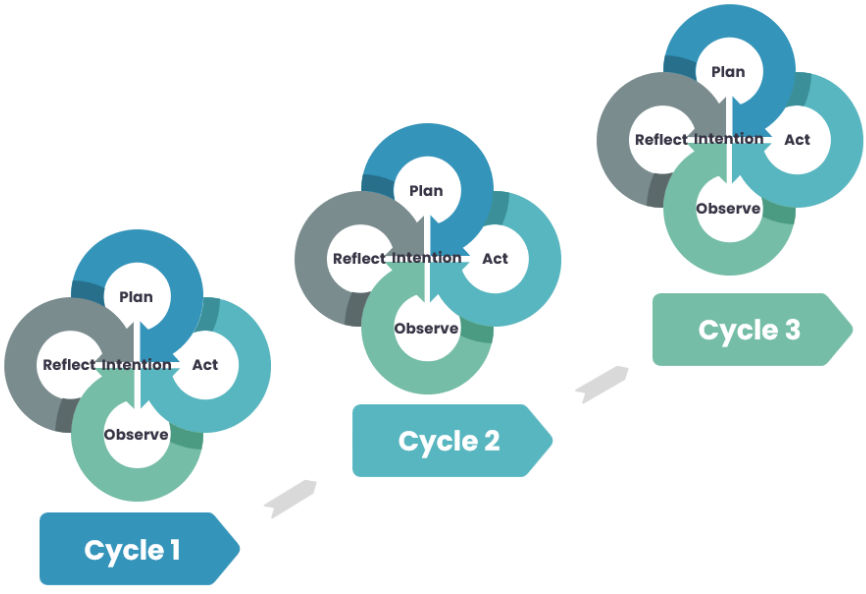
Action Research Design

The Spiraling and Iterative Nature of Action Research

The foundation of action research is based on a cyclical process that does not have to have a designated ending (Glanz, 2014). Action research is collaborative and directed by the understandings gained by the participants. As Bloomberg (2023) described, "The research process is iterative, cyclical, and participative in nature and is intended to foster deeper understanding of a given situation informing future action…Many work settings have embraced action research as a collaborative form of continual organizational learning" (p. 102-103). Iterative cycles were necessary for the ARIT. With each, they used past knowledge to develop current interventions to impact future outcomes (Coghlan, 2019). Figure 3.2 is a visual representation of the repetition of action research cycles used in this study.

Figure 3.2

The Spiraling Nature of Action Research



Note. Adapted from Coghlan (2019) Spiral of Action Research Cycles

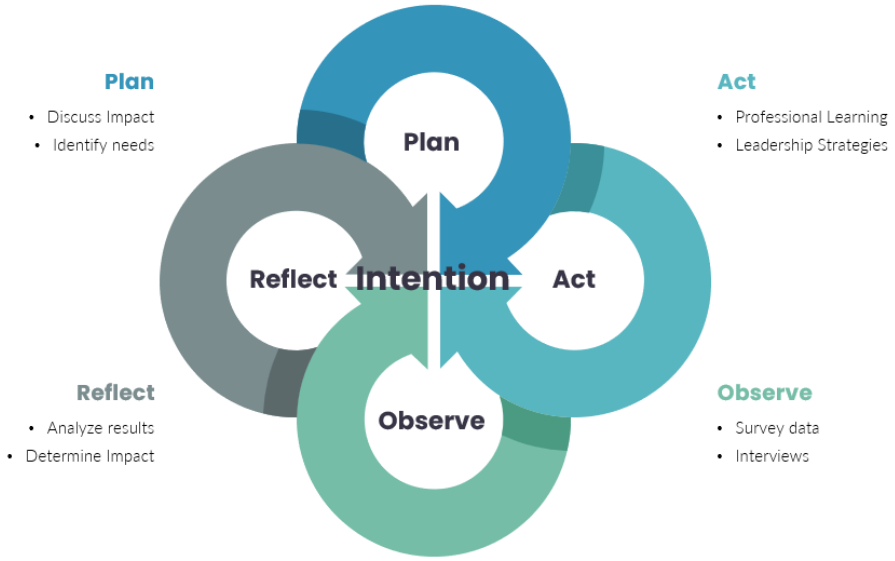
The goal of the iterative cycles was to increase the capacity of school leaders to provide differentiated support to elementary school teachers. The ARIT engaged in the plan, act, observe, and reflect improvement cycles to continuously monitor the effectiveness of the intervention and narrow in on the needs of the teachers on their teams. Practical knowledge was generated through engagement in these action and reflection cycles (Coghlan, 2019). The logic model structured each cycle in this study to center the ARIT.

Logic Model

The logic model depicted in Figure 3.3 served as a guide to examine how school leaders supported and facilitated the resilience and self-efficacy growth among the teachers in the departments they led. This model allowed the administrator to develop school leaders during the plan, act, and reflect phases. The school leaders used new skills and strategies to support individual teachers on their team during the act and observe phases. Quality participation was enhanced by providing flexibility in the process (Coghlan, 2019). Therefore, the ARIT allowed for natural overlap in portions of the cycle when forward progress was impacted. Participants were encouraged to reflect and inquire about strategies or concepts that needed clarity and understanding throughout the cycle.

Figure 3.3

Logic Model for Study



Note: Adapted from Coghlan (2019) Action Research Cycle

The logic model used in this study provided a collaborative support cycle for school leaders that included their peers and an administrator. The cycle began with a planning session to discuss identified problems and needed support. The primary researcher delivered aligned professional learning and leadership strategies and developed an action plan collaboratively with the implementation team to utilize during the following month. At the end of each cycle, the implementation team collected and analyzed qualitative data from teachers to reflect on the effectiveness of the action plan. The primary researcher also used these data to reflect on the impact of the school leader's capacity during the Act phase of each cycle. Each school leader worked collaboratively with peers during the Reflect phase to determine a new problem or clarify the need for support during the next cycle.

Theory of Change

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of differentiated supports on the resilience and self-efficacy of elementary school teachers. This research was founded on the transformational leadership and social support theories. The researcher adapted these theories in this study to combine the transformational relationship between leader and follower, as described by Burns (1978), with the specific types of social support developed by House (1981). Overcoming a stressful circumstance leads to resilience and confidence that future stressors can be overcome. House (1981) described four types of support that lead to feelings of confidence when stressors arise in the workplace.

1. Emotional - showing compassion and empathy
2. Instrumental - providing material items or actions
3. Informational - providing information that can aid in decision-making
4. Appraisal - providing specific praise of skills or traits that lead to success

Building teacher resilience was essential in this context due to political forces undermining the success building leaders had in positively impacting teachers (Babb et al., 2022). With this understanding, the ARDT worked collaboratively to develop professional learning for school leaders, increasing their capacity to implement individualized support to their team members. Providing differentiated support required the ARIT to understand what their team members defined as supportive behaviors. The ARIT used the theory of change around the four types of social support and transformational practices to support teachers' belief in their ability to sustain challenging circumstances. The research findings were used to answer the questions.

The Case

With growing concerns about the number of teachers seeking employment outside of Lucas Pointe Elementary (LPES), attention to the type and level of support provided by school leaders was a top priority for the ARDT. The team sought to understand the unique perspective of how each teacher defined support, essential to the transformational relationship between influential leaders and how they motivate teachers on their teams. In this case, the ARDT sought to build the capacity of school leaders to identify and apply differentiated social supports that led to beliefs of resilience and self-efficacy. This case study focused on 3rd through 5th-grade teachers at LPES and the school leaders who supported their work. The study findings are only connected to this specific set of educators.

Case studies provide an in-depth look at a bounded context through analysis of multiple perspectives to gain a thorough understanding and guide the improvement of practices (Bloomberg, 2023; Glanz, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). They are used frequently in education and guided by a specific set of research questions. The primary researcher conducts deep analysis and provides vivid descriptions of the findings from a particular context (Glanz, 2014).

Yin (2018) provided criteria for an exemplary case study, including relevance in a real-world situation, close attention to contextual boundaries, and analysis of differing perspectives. Investigating the individual definitions of support related to the LPES 3rd through 5th-grade teachers allowed the ARIT to apply differentiated leadership strategies over three months to impact feelings of competence and endurance. These case study findings can be instrumental in a broad application for elementary school leaders (Bloomberg, 2023).

Action Research Design Team

During action research, the researcher collaborated with participants to solve problems of practice within the study context (Glanz, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Data analysis increased understanding of the context and the impact of the intervention. The ARDT members were all assigned to LPES through employment in the Allan County School District and shared an understanding of the demographics and culture of the school context.

During this study, the primary researcher had served as an assistant principal at LPES for six years. Before becoming the assistant principal, she had served the school as an instructional coach, gifted coordinator, and Title 1 Support teacher for all grade levels. She had a vested interest in improving the supportive practices of school leaders to enhance the morale and positive culture of the teachers she supervised. As a member of this school context for thirteen years, she had a unique perspective on potential roadblocks during study development.

A recently retired principal, Dr. Trina Oliver, was included in the ARDT due to her 37 years of education experience, 13 years as principal of LPES, and significant knowledge of developing leaders through coaching. She was very familiar with the action research process as a professor of doctoral level courses at a local university. Mrs. Lucy Bound, the 2nd Grade Team leader, understood the dynamics between administrators and teachers in this context. She was known for providing high-quality feedback and framing change with positivity. Her team had the highest morale at LPES, and she had shown evidence of personal resilience through difficult circumstances.

Also essential to the ARDT was a former Allan County School District human resources department employee, Dr. Sinclair Alethea. She previously was the director of system-wide teacher Induction and Alternative Certification programs. She deeply understood teacher support

structures and the action research cycle from her recent doctoral program completion. Dr. Leigh Mills was selected as a member of the ARDT for her deep understanding of the context of the study and the teacher challenges in this context. She served as an assistant principal in the middle school fed by LPES. She had also recently completed action research and provided great insight into planning the interventions. Table 3.2 details the role of each ARDT member.

Table 3.2

Action Research Design Team

Team Member	Primary Role at Lucas Pointe Elementary	Action Research Role
Primary Researcher	Assistant Principal Grades 3-5, LPES	Leader of research and data analysis for the Design Team. 18 years of experience in education, and six years of experience in administration.
Dr. Trina Oliver	Retired Principal of LPES	Provided leadership development expertise, as well as an action research perspective. 38 years of education experience, including 13 as principal of LPES.
Mrs. Lucy Boling	2nd Grade Team Leader, LPES	Provided lens of support implementation and developing positive team morale. 13 years of education experience, including two as a grade-level leader.
Dr. Sinclair Alethea	Former Induction and Alternative Certification Program Director for Allan County School District	Provided knowledge of creating district-wide support structures differentiated by school context and experience with action research. 15 years of education experience, including three years in the human resources department.

Team Member	Primary Role at Lucas Pointe Elementary	Action Research Role
Dr. Leigh Mills	Assistant Principal at neighboring middle school	Provided understanding of the context and challenges faced by teachers at LPES

The ARDT members were each selected for their unique perspective within the context and ability to communicate authentically. Members attended an initial meeting to orient themselves to the literature that founded the study, the theoretical framework, and the proposed action research logic model. The researcher provided background for the context, defined the research questions, and shared the purpose of intervention in this initial meeting.

The ARDT collaboratively created interventions for school leaders to clearly define and implement differentiated support to teachers in third through fifth grades. Participants and ARIT members worked with the ARDT during the three action research cycles.

Action Research Implementation Team

The researcher invited teacher leaders to participate on the Action Research Implementation Team (ARIT) if they led a grade level or department that included students in grades 3-5 during the 2024-2025 school year. The researcher also invited coaches to participate if they served as school-level coaches during the 2024-2025 school year. Individuals who met these criteria and signed consent were eligible to participate.

The grade-level leaders in the ARIT had prior experience working collaboratively with the primary researcher to support their teams and improve school practices. This collaboration was facilitated through monthly “check-in” meetings, including sharing team needs, clarifying expectations, and developing leadership strategies. The other participants on the implementation

team had not been a part of these monthly collaborative meetings. Table 3.3 shares the ARIT members, their leadership roles at LPES, and their previous experience in education.

Table 3.3

Action Research Implementation Team

Team Member	Primary Role at Lucas Pointe Elementary	Experience
Mrs. Fane Austin	3rd Grade Team Leader	14 years of teaching experience, 1st year as 3rd Grade Team Leader
Mrs. Gracen Thomas	4th Grade Team Leader	16 years of teaching experience, 3rd year as 4th Grade Team Leader
Ms. Fallon Waite	5th Grade Team Leader	Nine years of teaching experience, 1st year as 5th Grade Team Leader
Mrs. Brooke Light	Special Education Department Leader	30 years of teaching experience, 7th year as the SPED Department Leader
Ms. Ruby Blackwell	3rd Grade Team Leader	Nine years of teaching experience, 2nd year as a 3rd Grade Team Leader
Mrs. Imala Mato	4th Grade Team Leader	16 years of teaching experience, 1st year as a 4th Grade Team Leader
Mrs. Leslie Rally	Educational Technology Coach	28 years of teaching experience, 7th year as Ed. Tech. Coach
Primary Researcher	Assistant Principal	18 years of experience in education and six years of experience in administration.

Research Plan and Timeline

Action research, which involves gathering information, continuous reflection, and planning action for improvement, is a collaborative process that allows organizations to develop an understanding of their people, systems, and structures.

> Designing a change project in an organization…involves building participation and commitment to the project, working with colleagues and others to understand why change is needed, co-developing a shared vision of its outcome, and co-constructing and implementing both the change itself and the accompanying learning and knowledge generation (Coghlan, 2019, p. 124).

Table 3.4 outlines the action research timeline and activities throughout the action cycles in this study.

Table 3.4

Research Plan and Timeline

Date	Action Research Design Team (ARDT) Activity	Action Research Implementation Team (ARIT) Activity
June 2024	• Secured Consent to participate	• Secured Consent to participate • Pre-Cycle Interviews
July 2024	• ARDT Meeting #1	• ARIT Orientation Meeting • Teacher Support Survey (Pre) • Teacher Resilience and Self-Efficacy Rating Scales
August 2024	• ARDT Meeting #2	• ARIT Monthly Meeting • Social Support Professional Learning • Researcher's Reflection Journal of Observations
September 2024	• ARDT Meeting #3	• ARIT Monthly Meeting • Data Review • Social Support Professional Learning

Date	Action Research Design Team (ARDT) Activity	Action Research Implementation Team (ARIT) Activity
		• Researcher's Reflection Journal of Observations
October 2024	• ARDT Meeting #4	• ARIT Monthly Meeting • Data Review • Social Support Professional Learning • Researcher's Reflection Journal of Observations • Teacher Support Survey (Post) • Teacher Resilience and Self-Efficacy Rating Scales
November 2024	• ARDT Conclusion Meeting • Review Researcher's Journal and Data Collected	• ARIT Conclusion Meeting • Artifact Review • Post Cycle Interviews

Context of the Study

Lucas Pointe Elementary School (LPES) was named after the former Lucas Pointe School, which opened in 1931 on five acres in northeastern Allan County and is the oldest in the county. The original Lucas Pointe K-12 schoolhouse began as the Allan County education hub and was built with funds from the Board of Education and the Lucas Pointe community. In 1939, Crossroads, Hopewell, and Pleasant Grove schools consolidated with Lucas Pointe. The school received a gymnasium and cafeteria soon after that merger. In 1967, Lucas Pointe High School was consolidated into the Allan County High School, now Allan Central High School.

The school received numerous renovations in 1973, including classrooms, a library, an office, and a modern cafeteria. Since that time, the school has had five renovations and improvements. As growth moved from a large urban area into the suburbs, Lucas Pointe became an elementary school, and a feeder high school opened in 2021 within the district lines. The Lucas Pointe Elementary District contained the most extensive land area-to-student ratio in the

state at the time of the study. Much of the land within the district was owned by cattle farmers. Many chicken hatcheries, haybales sitting in rolling green pastures, and feed stores evidenced a focus on agriculture.

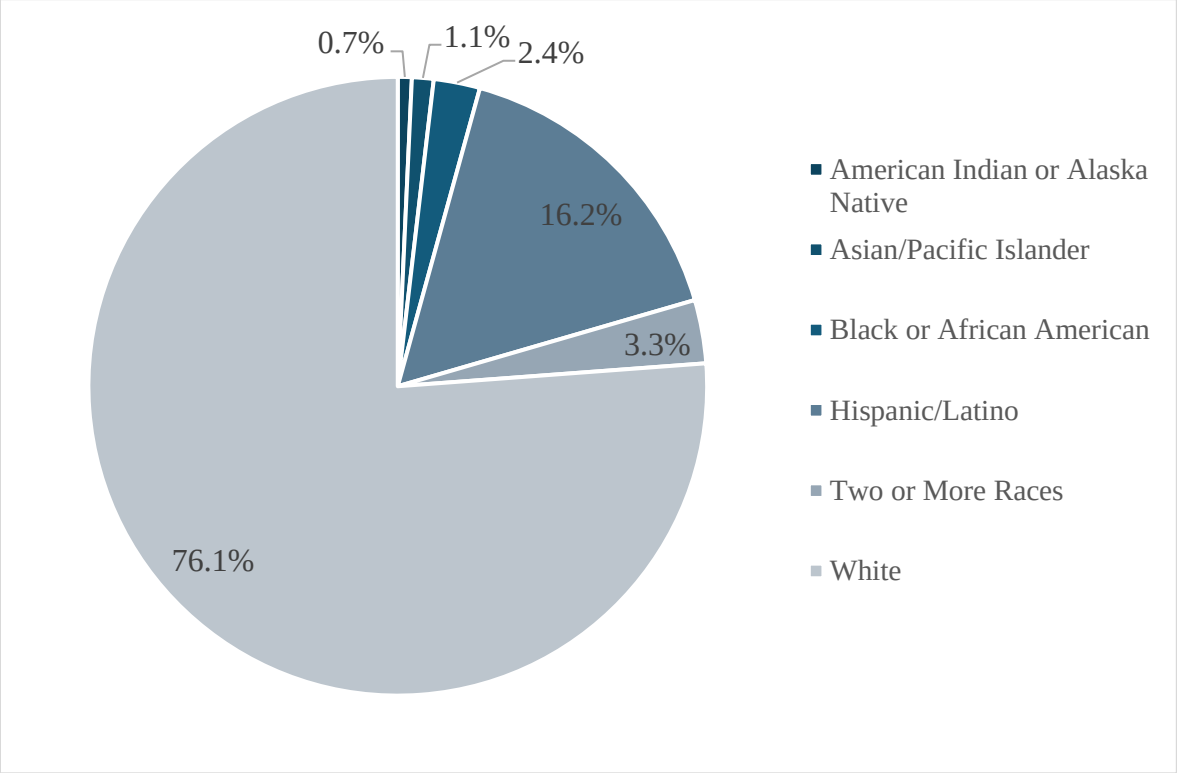
LPES remained a family-oriented community school. In 2015, it received the Family Friendly School of the Year award from the State Department of Education. In 2018, Lucas Pointe had the highest parent perception rating of elementary schools in the Allan County District. Lucas Pointe made many efforts to lower the adverse effects of the school's external environment. With many students experiencing housing instability and food insecurity, steps were taken to meet immediate non-academic needs first. Weekend food bag programs, holiday meal baskets, and family nights that provided food, winter coat/clothes closets, and supplements to provide medical needs were just a few ways that Lucas Pointe strived to meet student needs.

Student Body Characteristics

Serving almost 1200 students, Lucas Pointe was the second largest elementary school in Allan County in the 2023 academic year. About 76% of LPES was made up of white, non-Hispanic students. The Hispanic population hovered at about 16%, with about 8% of the entire student population being served in the English as a Second Language program. During this research, 42% of students were considered economically disadvantaged. The ethnic makeup of the student body at LPES in 2023 is represented in Figure 3.4.

Figure 3.4

Ethnicity for LPES Students (2023)



Note: Data were retrieved from the Allan County Infinite Campus data system.

While LPES served the highest population of special education students in the Allan County School District, at 20%, it was underrepresented in the gifted population. Approximately seven percent of students were identified as gifted. It was the lowest-achieving school in Allan County for many years, so much emphasis was placed on supporting struggling learners. Academic enrichment had not been a top priority in the past. Gifted characteristics in students were often overlooked due to behavior issues or teachers focusing on the lowest-achieving students.

As a professional working in this community, one must understand generational poverty. To impact some of the students at LPES on an academic level, teachers first had to

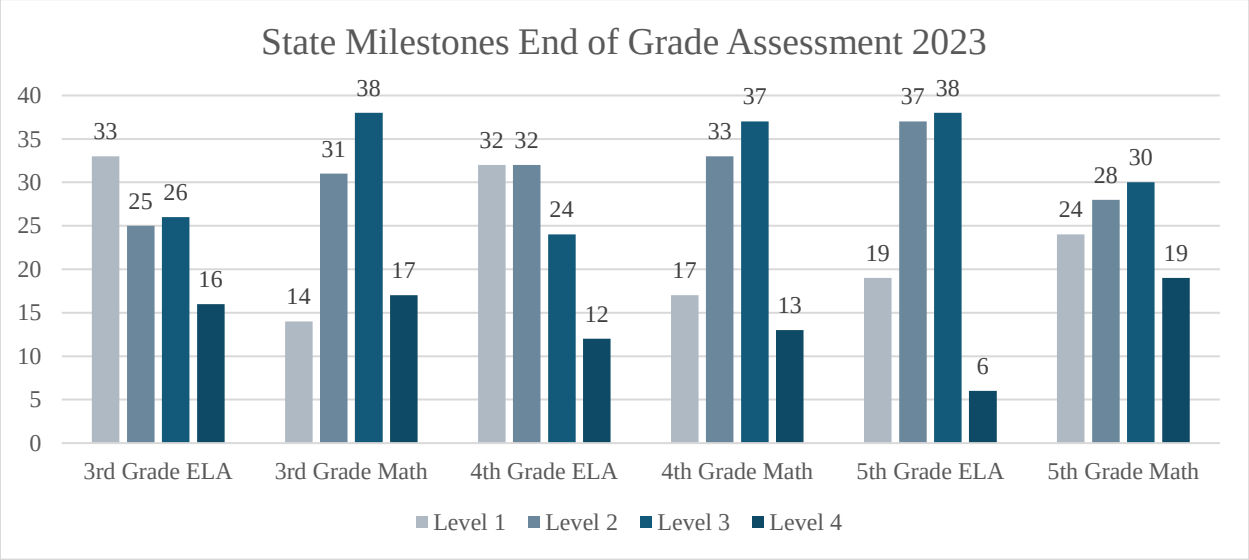
ensure their basic needs had been met. Did they have dinner last night or breakfast before school? Where did they sleep last night? Did they witness behaviors that are unfit for children? Are they emotionally distraught due to an abusive situation or parent incarceration? Do they have childhood trauma that is preventing the activation of the learning brain? Lucas Pointe Elementary had one of the highest discipline referral rates in Allan County. Many students lacked the readiness skills to show stamina for a structured school day. Lucas Pointe used a Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) system to teach expectations and reward student progress.

Student Achievement

For decades, reading instruction had been the main focus for school improvement at LPES due to high numbers of illiterate parents and an absence of literacy-rich home environments before school entrance. Most school improvement goals were centered around reading and writing instruction. When the leadership team began to see the fruit of these targeted improvement goals in reading pay off in the form of student achievement scores, the Lucas Pointe leadership team switched its improvement target to math, specifically math problem-solving. In the three years before the research study, the school improvement focus had centered first on perseverance through math problem-solving and second on parent engagement in academics. Between 2019 and 2022, there was an increase in math achievement scores on the State Milestones End of Grade Assessment. The data in Figure 3.5 represents third-, fourth-, and fifth-grade performance on the State Milestones End-of-Grade Assessment in the spring of 2023. Achievement levels are displayed by the percentage of students that performed at that level.

Figure 3.5

Student Performance on State Milestones End of Grade Assessment (2023)



Note: Data retrieved from the State Department of Education College and Career Readiness Performance Index Report (2023).

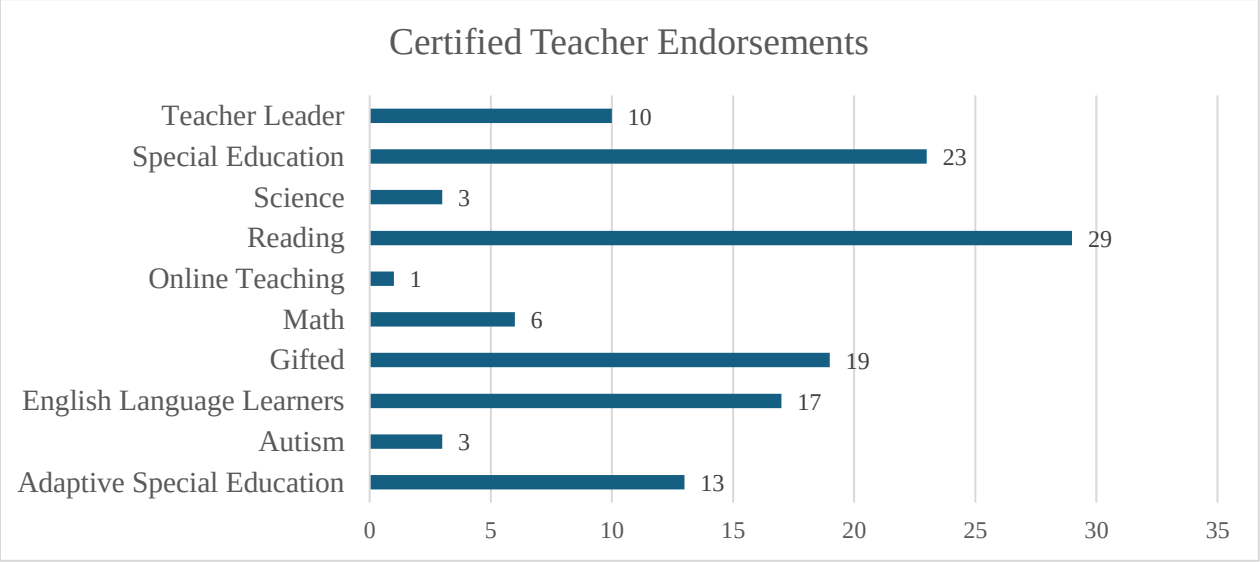
Figure 3.5 shows the continued need to target improvement in reading and math. By the end of the school year, over half of the third, fourth, and fifth graders did not meet grade-level standards.

Staff Characteristics

Although all the LPES teachers were highly qualified, teachers had a range of experience and certifications. Of the 90 certified teachers, 34 held Bachelor's degrees, 38 obtained a Master's degree, and 15 received their Specialist's degree. The LPES and assistant principal were the only certified staff members holding a Doctorate Degree. Many Lucas Pointe teachers held additional certifications.

Figure 3.6

Certifications of LPES Certified Staff Members (2023)



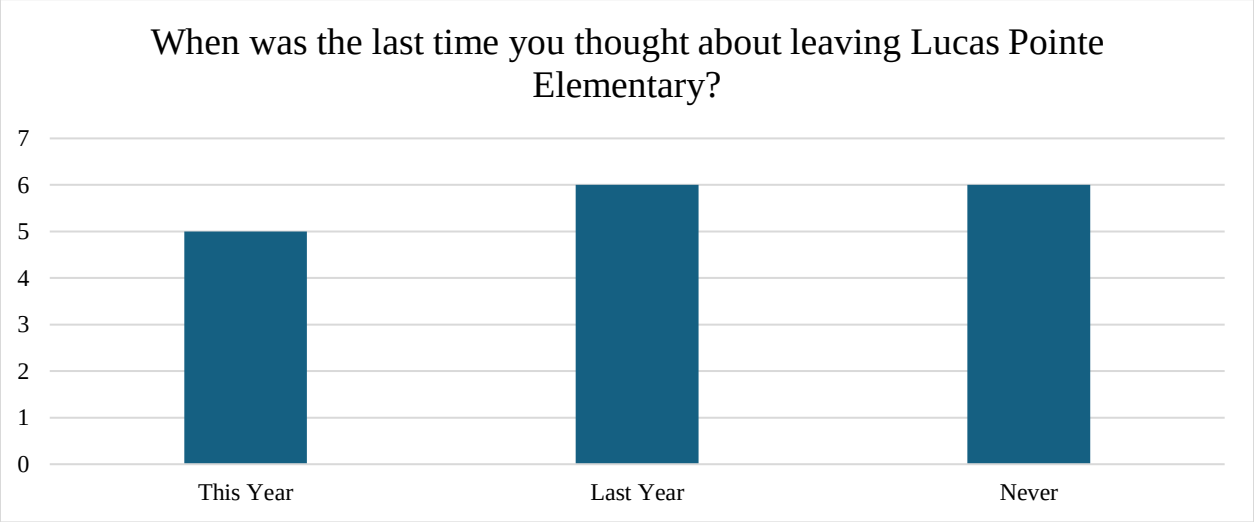
Note: Data sourced from the Allan County human resources department.

Diversity was low among the 90 LPES instructional staff members, with one male and three Hispanic staff members. All other instructional staff members were white females.

Seventeen certified LPES staff members participated in stay interviews during the spring of 2023 to gain insight into the elements of the school culture that positively impacted teacher retention.

Figure 3.7

Question 4 from Lucas Pointe Stay Interviews (Spring 2023)



The stay interview data identified that most of the staff interviewed remained at the school because of the culture of positive relationships with peers, administrators, and students. However, 11 of the 17 teachers interviewed reported considering leaving the school within the last two years.

Leadership

LPES had a culture of distributed leadership. Three administrators collaborated with the instructional coach, instructional technology specialist, and an assistant administrator to form the CORE team that provided vision and structure. Three supporting leadership teams representing each grade level and department provided input and action to the vision. These teams focused on three pillars of school improvement at LPES: Instruction, Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports (PBIS), and Communication.

Impact of Covid-19

Like many schools nationwide, LPES experienced deviations from standard public school practices between 2020 and 2022. In March of 2022, there was a sudden shift to complete virtual

instruction. Unfortunately, many students who lived in the most northern section of the Lucas Pointe School district could not access virtual instruction during this time. This area, known as "The Cove," did not have access to an internet provider due to the geographic topography of the land. Despite staff efforts to deliver instructional materials to support learning at home, most students in this area did not receive equitable education between March and June of 2020.

Some students and teachers continued virtual instruction during the 2020-21 school year, and those who chose in-person were required to adhere to strict protocols for student and faculty safety, which significantly limited collaboration. The school district required masks for staff members, which shielded students from traditional reassurance, such as a smile from their teacher. Students could not fraternize with peers in other classrooms, limiting the progression of social skills. Teachers had to eat in classrooms with students and only meet virtually to plan with grade-alike colleagues. This type of isolation took a toll on the mental health and stamina of everyone at LPES. Students and staff exposed to COVID-19 were restricted access to school for ten days. Student absences due to quarantining were astronomical. Learning regression became evident in many students who could only attend school sometimes during the 2020-21 and 2021-22 school years.

Data Sources

LPES teachers experienced new challenges in the post-pandemic years, evidenced by requests for more support from school leaders. Significant academic gaps in student learning, political unrest in society, and increased expectations on planning and assessment created too taxing environments for some educators. Demands for support were validated through school leaders' participation in this study. The data sources examined all perspectives on designing, implementing, and receiving differentiated support in elementary school.

Participants

The researcher served as an assistant principal at LPES. Components of the role included supervising and evaluating teachers in third through fifth grades who participated in this study. This study incorporated teacher voice as a critical component in understanding individual support definitions. Teacher leaders and teachers involved in this study had experienced the unique challenges presented in the post-pandemic era. Many of the staff members they supported were new to LPES or the teaching field. Due to attrition at LPES, of the seven teacher leaders invited to participate in this study, four were in their first or second year of leadership. The coach, administrator, and two teacher leaders who participated all had more than three years of leadership experience. Collecting data from the perspective of the leader was necessary to determine the benefits and costs of applying differentiated support to team members. Teachers in grades three through five participated in surveys to share the impacts of the study on their resilience and self-efficacy.

Selection Criteria

The researcher used purposeful criterion sampling to select participants in this study. Bloomberg (2023) shared, “From this perspective, purposeful selection is a strategy for accessing appropriate data that fit the purpose of the study, the resources available, the questions being asked, and the constraints and challenges being faced” (p. 268). The researcher invited teacher leaders to participate if they led a grade level or department that included students in grades 3-5 during the 2024-2025 school year. The researcher also invited coaches who served as school-level coaches during the 2024-2025 school year. Individuals who met these criteria and signed consent were eligible to participate. While this research may contribute to the body of knowledge regarding the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on teacher resilience and self-efficacy, it does

not explicitly generalize to the population. Participants were chosen to gain a specific understanding within this context.

The next section of this chapter details the data collection methods used in this action research study.

Data Collection Methods

Data collection for this action research study involved qualitative and quantitative methods specifically selected to gain a thorough understanding of the experiences of both the implementation team and the teachers they led. Grounded in the theoretical framework and guided by research questions, these data collection methods helped the researcher to create a meaningful story of the action research case study.

Data collection methods used in this study included:

1. Questionnaires of resilience and self-efficacy by teachers in grades three through five at the beginning and end of the study.
2. Individual interviews of the ARIT before and after the action research cycles.
3. Focus Group conducted monthly with the ARIT during each action research cycle to gain an understanding of their experiences supporting teachers.
4. Observations of meetings facilitated by the ARIT members.
5. Researcher journal notes based on observations during grade level meetings and on observations during the action research team meetings.

The researcher recorded and transcribed all interviews and focus group sessions. The qualitative data transcriptions were analyzed using a coding scheme. Themes and patterns were developed by examining the codes. The implementation team collected quantitative data from

teachers and school leaders throughout this study and analyzed it to reflect on the impact of the action plan.

Questionnaires

As one of the most common data collection forms, questionnaires provide an efficient, uncomplex way for participants to share their perspectives (Glanz, 2014). Components of research-based Resilience and Self-Efficacy scales were selected to ensure reliability and validity. The Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale- CD-RISC (2003) and Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale- TSES (2001) short form were selected for their ability to determine targets for individualized support. Teachers in grades three through five were asked to participate in a two-part questionnaire before and after the action research cycles. These questionnaires used a closed-ended Likert-Scale format and were completed individually by teachers to determine any changes in resilience and self-efficacy factors.

Tables 3.5 and 3.6 provide examples of the factors and actions considered in the CD-RISC and TSES. Appendix A contains a copy of the full Resilience and Self-Efficacy Rating Scales.

Table 3.5

Sample Indicators from the Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale (TSES)

Factor Area	Teacher Actions
Instructional Strategies	Crafting good questions for students
	Using a variety of assessment strategies
Student Management	Controlling disruptive behavior
	Getting children to follow classroom rules
Student Engagement	Motivating students who show low interest in schoolwork
	Helping students value learning

Note. The TSES was developed and validated by Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy (2001).

Table 3.6

Sample Indicators from the Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC)

Factor Area	Teacher Actions
Personal competence, high standards, and tenacity	Working hard to attain goals
Trust in one's instincts, tolerance of negative affect, and strengthening effects of stress	Coping with stress makes me stronger
Positive acceptance of change and secure relationships	Making unpopular or difficult decisions
Control	Feeling in control
Spiritual Influences	Having a strong sense of purpose in life

Note. Connor, K. M., & Davidson, J. R. (2003) developed and validated the CD-RISC.

Surveys

Like most action research surveys, the one used in this study included questions that captured demographic, conceptual, and perception data (Bloomberg, 2023). The ARDT developed a survey to collect data to support the findings of the first research question. How do teachers in one suburban elementary school describe the comprehensive support needed in the

post-pandemic era? This survey was critical for supporting the design of interventions for the ARIT. The survey was given to individual teachers and school leaders at the beginning of the study to determine a unique definition of support needed and how it aligned with the four types of social support described in the theoretical framework. To increase participation, the survey was available to be completed online and had a limited number of open-ended questions.

Table 3.7 provides a sampling of the survey questions and their alignment with the research questions. The complete survey is in Appendix B.

Table 3.7

Sample questions from the Teacher Support Definition Survey

Research Questions	Interview Questions
RQ1: How do teachers in one suburban elementary school describe the comprehensive support needed in the post-pandemic era?	How do you personally define "support" in the context of your role as a teacher? How do you define success in your role? How satisfied are you with the level of support you currently receive in your teaching role?

Interviews

When we cannot observe every action, we can create meaning through the opinions, experiences, and perspectives of individuals through dialogue (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Interviews are a primary method for collecting data for many qualitative case studies (Bloomberg, 2023; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The researcher interviewed a teacher supported by an ARIT member at the end of the action research cycles. The interview protocol was structured

to gain insight into the intervention implementation. The researcher summarized the findings from the interviews with the ARIT to reflect on the study.

Table 3.8 shows the alignment between interview questions and the overall research questions. The complete pre- and post-individual interview protocol is in Appendix C and Appendix D.

Table 3.8

Sample Individual Interview Questions

Research Questions	Interview Questions
RQ1: How do teachers in one suburban elementary school describe the comprehensive support needed in the post-pandemic era?	Can you describe how your school year is going so far? What has been most helpful to your success? What are some areas of strength, and what are some areas of improvement for Lucas Pointe Elementary School leaders?
RQ2: What is the impact of school leaders on suburban elementary teachers' self-efficacy and resilience?	How often do you receive support, and how does it impact your practice? Describe your relationship with your team members.

Structured Focus Group

The researcher conducted a focus group with the implementation team at the start of each month and end of the study to gain perspectives about differentiating support for elementary teachers. The researcher acted as a facilitator, keeping the focus group on track with the structured questions but allowing for conversation to spark new thoughts. Unlike individual interviews, this focus group produced socially constructed data that was refined by the thinking

of other group members (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The natural, relaxed atmosphere of a focus group allowed unanticipated insights to develop based on the perspectives of other group members. While there is a higher risk of unknowns, this data collection method could add meaning to the responses of individuals. It could also shift responses depending on social persuasion (Bloomberg, 2023). Considerations were made in developing norms for this group to ensure confidentiality in sharing perspectives.

Table 3.9 illustrates a sampling of the questions that guided the focus group. Complete agendas are included in Appendix E.

Table 3.9

Sample Focus Group Questions

Research Questions	Discussion Questions
RQ2: What is the impact of school leaders on suburban elementary teachers' self-efficacy and resilience?	What impacts have you observed through providing differentiated support to your team members? How have the four components of social support theory guided your leadership?
RQ3: How does the action research team describe the process of designing and implementing comprehensive support structures for teachers in one suburban elementary school?	Share your experience with differentiating support for your team members during this cycle. Discuss how your communication, preparation, and/or approach differed for each support style.

Observations

The ARDT conducted observations of department PLC meetings to gain firsthand knowledge of the relationships and behaviors of the ARIT and the teachers they supported, which was valuable to the design team. Observations added evidence to answer the research questions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). There was no interaction between the researcher and participants during the observation. The researcher recorded and observed behaviors to identify patterns and an understanding of relationships (Bloomberg, 2023; Glanz, 2014). The researcher made anecdotal notes on the climate of the team and the behaviors of individual members.

The ARDT developed interventions throughout the action research cycles to support teacher needs identified through data collection. The following section will describe interventions applied during this case study.

Data Analysis

Transforming raw data through inferential processes can be a challenging, time-consuming process. Once data collection has begun, the "how" of data analysis can feel overwhelming. However, developing themes and creating meaningful, rich descriptions are some of the most exciting parts of qualitative research (Bloomberg, 2023; Glanz, 2014). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) urged that data analysis must begin when the first piece of data is collected. "Without ongoing analysis, the data can be unfocused, repetitious, and overwhelming" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 197). Due to the inductive and iterative nature of qualitative research, data analysis does not occur as an isolated event (Bloomberg, 2023). Unlike quantitative data analyzed after a study, qualitative data is analyzed cyclically throughout the study. There is no one right way to analyze qualitative data. The researcher is required to take a creative approach

(Glanz, 2014). In this study, the researcher used a process of coding and thematic analysis to gain a deeper understanding of the data collected.

Coding

Coding provides the link between data collection and meaning. It involves a classification process to "reduce the data" (Bloomberg, 2023, p. 342). Saldana (2013) felt the researcher must decide what coding methods best fit the study. The researcher completed multiple review cycles during the data collection and before coding began. Reflection occurred on an ongoing basis through a researcher's journal. This allowed the researcher to consider the filter they applied when coding data and how that could differ from other qualitative researchers. Many computer-based analysis tools exist, but the researcher preferred a more blended approach to coding by memoing interview and focus group transcripts that were digitally recorded. Inductive reasoning was used when assigning codes (Bloomberg, 2023). The researcher used computer-based software to enhance the analysis and efficient data recall once codes were developed and applied through multiple reviews of qualitative data.

Thematic Analysis

"Coding is only the initial step toward an even more rigorous and evocative analysis and interpretation for a report" (Saldana, 2013, p. 31). This study strictly followed a content analysis process, as the researcher did not have predetermined categories or themes based on theory or hypothesis (Glanz, 2014). The researcher reread transcripts of individual interviews, focus groups, and answers from short answer surveys three times. Each review of the data revealed new themes. As Bogdan and Biklen (2011) suggested, a researcher cannot pursue everything. The researcher made decisions that narrowed the study during each review. These themes were then analyzed to determine patterns and then develop codes. Codes were initially recorded with a

description in the researcher's journal and then applied to specific phrases or keywords in the printed transcripts. The researcher carefully considered forming a narrative that supported the reader's ability to make sense of the themes as they did not just "emerge" (Bloomberg, 2023, p. #). A chart of the thematic analysis process is summarized in Table 3.10.

Table 3.10

Thematic Analysis Process

Steps for Analyzing Data and Developing Themes	Related Processes
Step 1: Organize and Prepare the Data	• Transcribing Interviews and Focus Group Meetings • Organize data collection types (interviews, surveys, observations, focus groups) for review
Step 2: Read the Data	• Read transcripts and other data twice • Memo the data directly on transcripts and make notes of general ideas in a researcher's journal
Step 3: Code the Data	• Identify chunks or topics that bring meaning • Develop categories and create codes • Record a code list
Step 4: Develop Themes	• Use repeated codes to define a category or theme that describes the data • Record thoughts during this process to develop a narrative of the data
Step 5: Represent the Findings	• Discuss initial narratives of the data with the ARIT • Create visuals to display the data in a meaningful way
Step 6: Make Meaning from the Data	• Interpret the data through the lens of the research questions, theoretical framework, and literature • Identify lessons learned from the data

Note: Adapted from Creswell (2013).

Preventing bias is a critical component of inductive data analysis, so the researcher prioritized it during this study. The researcher and ARDT developed a reliable process to reduce the likelihood that bias was applied to data analysis. Using specific processes for reviewing data, coding, and developing themes increased the validity and trustworthiness of the study.

Reliability, Validity, and Generalizability

The question of reliability within a study asks if replicated studies would yield similar results (Bloomberg, 2023; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) discussed how this is not as much a concern in qualitative studies as "whether the results are consistent with the data collected" (p. 251). This is due to the nature of qualitative research as a descriptive process used to create meaning from the experiences of others rather than to determine scientific reasoning. Bloomberg (2023) stated that "Qualitative research is, at its core, about sharing, respecting, and most importantly authentically and ethically representing diverse voices" (p, 116). For these reasons, the findings of small qualitative action research studies do not frequently generalize to other contexts (Glanz, 2014). "The nature of qualitative research is so personal that external reliability is difficult to attain" (Glanz, 2014, p. 309). For this reason, it must be noted that the interventions developed within the context of this study were specific to the needs defined by the participants.

The rigor and ethical nature of methods used in a study are two keys to increasing reliability. The researcher spent significant time reviewing, reflecting, and validating the data to increase rigor to promote more reliable findings. The rigorous strategies used in this qualitative study included:

1. Data Triangulation: This strategy involves cross-checking multiple data sources at various points to increase the credibility of findings (Bloomberg, 2023; Glanz, 2014).

This qualitative research study compared interview responses to observations made during team interactions on multiple dates. Transcripts of commentary gained during focus group sessions were compared to survey results and observations. Table 3.11 relates additional points of triangulation during the study.

2. Member Checking: The researcher solicited feedback on reflections and findings to prevent misinterpretation of meaning when analyzing data (Bloomberg, 2023). The researcher asked interviewees to review the initial reflection and provide feedback on notes before the coding process began.
3. Reflective Researcher's Journal: Accounting for biases throughout the data analysis process was facilitated using a researcher's journal. The researcher strived to stay objective through analysis to prevent preconceived understandings or judgments when reviewing data or observing participants (Coghlan, 2019; Bloomberg, 2023). The journal served as a method for documenting the reflections and decision-making processes of the researcher (Creswell, 2013).
4. Peer Review: In this study, the researcher collaborated with the ARIT to develop interrater reliability when coding and theming data (Glanz, 2014). Having other members provide feedback on emergent themes increased the rigor of the data analysis.
5. Thick, Rich Descriptions: A thorough explanation of the data collection and analysis methods used in a narrative increased the reader's confidence in the reliability of this study. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) insisted, "The qualitative study provides the reader with a depiction in enough detail to show that the author's conclusion 'makes sense' (p. 238).

Table 3.11

Triangulation of Research Methods

Research Questions	Methods of Data Collection	Methods of Data Analysis	Approximate Timeline
RQ1: How do teachers in one suburban elementary school describe the comprehensive support needed in the post-pandemic era?	Surveys	Coding/Analysis of Themes	July 2024
	Individual Interviews	Coding/Analysis of Themes	June 2024
	Observations	Researcher Reflection	August 2024-October 2024
RQ2: What is the impact of school leaders on suburban elementary teachers' self-efficacy and resilience?	Questionnaires	Researcher Reflection	July 2024 and October 2024
	Researcher's Journal	Researcher Reflection	August 2024-October 2024
	Observations	Researcher Reflection	August 2024-October 2024
RQ3: How does the action research team describe the process of designing and implementing comprehensive support structures for teachers in one suburban elementary school?	Individual Interviews	Coding/Analysis of Themes	June 2024 and October 2024
	Focus Group	Coding/Analysis of Themes	July 2024-October 2024
	Observations	Researcher Reflection	August 2024-October 2024

Ethical action research should benefit and not harm people (Bloomberg, 2023; Glanz, 2014; McLean, 1995). Glanz (2014) described five ethical principles to guide the work of action researchers: accurate disclosure, beneficence, confidentiality, honesty, and privacy. Ensuring the privacy and confidentiality of all participants involved in this study increased the assurances of ethical practice by the researcher (Bloomberg, 2023). The researcher used informed consent, stating that participation would not impact teacher evaluation. Participants had the right to

withdraw consent and discontinue participation at any stage without negative influence on their work performance. Personal identifying information was kept confidential by using pseudonyms. A key was maintained during the study within a digitally secure file and destroyed after the completion of data analysis.

Subjectivity Statement

Bloomberg (2023) stated, “Declaring our positionality and exposing how we show up makes for fully transparent and trustworthy research” (p. 116). Transparency in this study was essential because the researcher had served in the school where the study occurred for over 13 years. She had over 18 years of education experience as a teacher, instructional coach, and administrator. As assistant principal at the research site, the researcher was devoted to supporting staff working in an elementary setting. Long-standing relationships existed between the researchers and some participants in the study. The researcher had seen the attrition of more teachers under her service since the COVID-19 pandemic than at any other time in her career. This experience led the researcher to investigate ways to differentiate support based on post-covid perspectives of elementary teacher needs. The researcher acknowledged the importance of maintaining a neutral position when researching and analyzing the data.

Limitations

A pre-understanding of the culture within an organization can serve and limit the knowledge, insights, and experiences of a researcher conducting qualitative research (Coghlan, 2019). When reflecting on how the dual role of the researcher and the internal participant could limit the reliability of the study, the researcher reviewed questions developed by Merriam and Tisdell (2016) to challenge the trustworthiness of qualitative research. The informal culture allowed the researcher to observe the participants without disrupting the environment. However,

holding a position of influence over the co-participants could have impacted the transparency in responses during participant interviews. The researcher could have also been limited by making assumptions during interviews where non-internal participants may have probed deeper (Coghlan, 2019).

Personal biases based on pre-existing work relationships could have limited the researcher's ability to view the data with the same lens as a non-internal researcher. Using a researcher's journal to reflect on the awareness of biases consistently prevented the researcher from making assumptions.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS FROM THE RESEARCH CASE

The initial purpose of this study was to determine the challenges presented to suburban elementary school teachers in the post-pandemic era and the impact of those challenges on their definition of support provided by elementary school leaders. The study also strived to combat the effect of these new challenges by developing perspectives on differentiated support structures for elementary teachers in a new era of teaching. The purpose of this study was supported by research around three major themes: challenges through the perspective of suburban elementary teachers in the post-pandemic teaching era, definitions of support in an elementary setting after the year 2020, and different types of administrative support structures and their influence on teacher job satisfaction and working conditions.

The research questions guiding this study took shape from the ponderings of the researcher in the spring of 2022. Why are teachers commenting on a lack of support as a reason to leave a position at Lucas Pointe Elementary School? What new challenges did the 21-22 school year pose that were not previously existent at Lucas Pointe Elementary School or the environment at large? How can support structures be altered to support the retention of teachers in the current day?

The following research questions were used to guide the investigation and draw conclusions from this action research study:

1. How do teachers in one suburban elementary school describe the comprehensive support needed in the post-pandemic era?

2. What is the impact of school leaders on suburban elementary teachers' self-efficacy and resilience?
3. How does the action research team describe the process of designing and implementing comprehensive support structures for teachers in one suburban elementary school?

Chapter 4 includes a detailed description of the problem in context, findings from this action research case, the story of school leaders using social support theory as a lens to support their teams, and a summary of the data collected.

Context of the Study

Lucas Pointe Elementary School (LPES, a pseudonym) is situated in the Northeast corner of suburban Allan County (a pseudonym). The school was established in 1931 as a community educational institution, and by 2024, the school educated and employed second or third-generation students and staff members. The impacts of generational poverty over 90 years have heightened attention to recruiting and maintaining high-quality teachers with a passion for reaching the most at-risk students. As the socio-economic status and diversity of Allan County increased over 20 years, Lucas Pointe has been the last area to experience a change in demographics.

Allan County has been noted as one of the wealthiest counties in the United States for many years. However, the northeastern corner of Allan County is home to many families living below the poverty line. LPES is often called Cinderella, a poor school in a wealthy district. The 2022-2023 school year was the first time the federal government did not award a Title 1 distinction to LPES due to a decrease in the free and reduced lunch percentage below 30%. The

percentage reduction caused the school to lose a large amount of federal funding previously used to hire additional staff members and pay for additional instructional materials.

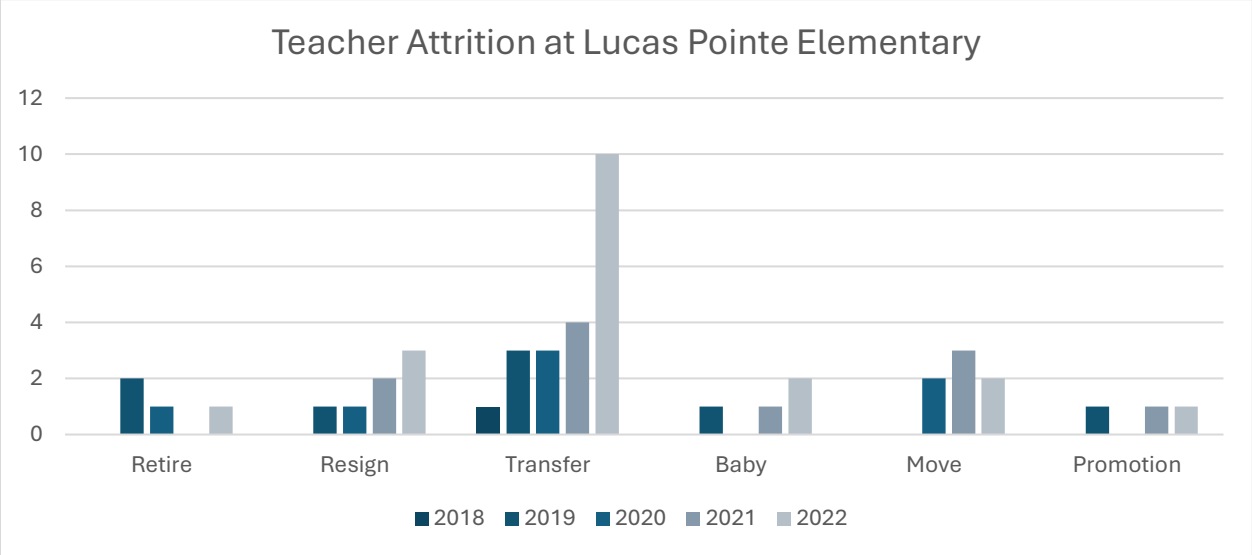
After high leader turnover between 2000 and 2010, the school district assigned a new principal to LPES and saw a significant shift towards achievement growth and positive climate change. Lucas Pointe maintained a 5-star climate rating for the five years before this study, as indicated by student and parent input and staff surveys. However, like many schools nationwide, LPES experienced deviations from standard public school practices between 2020 and 2022.

Problem Framing in the Context

There was a sudden shift to virtual instruction at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2022. Some students and teachers continued virtual instruction during the 2020-2021 school year, while others chose in-person instruction that required adherence to strict protocols for student and faculty safety. These protocols significantly limited collaboration and increased academic and social regression for many students who often could not attend school during the 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 school years. While most teachers showed resilience and stamina during the 2020-2022 school years, by spring 2022, rumblings of dissatisfaction and doubt in school choice were heard across the LPES campus. Figure 4.1 represents the reasons presented by staff leaving the school over five years.

Figure 4.1

Teacher Attrition at Lucas Pointe Elementary (2018-2022)



Note: Data was collected from yearly summative conferences with the LPES administration.

By the end of the 2021-2022 school year, LPES experienced a more significant number of teachers leaving than in the preceding five years. While the main reasons for the transition varied, many high-quality teachers shared that deficient support contributed to their decision to leave LPES or the education field altogether. Beginning the 2022-2023 school year with 18 new certified teachers led to the need for additional mentors, training, supply funding, and time for capacity building. While much effort was focused on developing new staff, many students academically performed far below grade level due to the continued impacts of the pandemic. The need to support the retention of teachers was more significant than ever.

Problem Framing Based on the Site

More emphasis in the Lucas Pointe community is on a simpler way of life where time spent in nature is prioritized over access to shopping. With endless green spaces, an affordable driving range, free access to lake beaches, and two recreational parks in our community, students

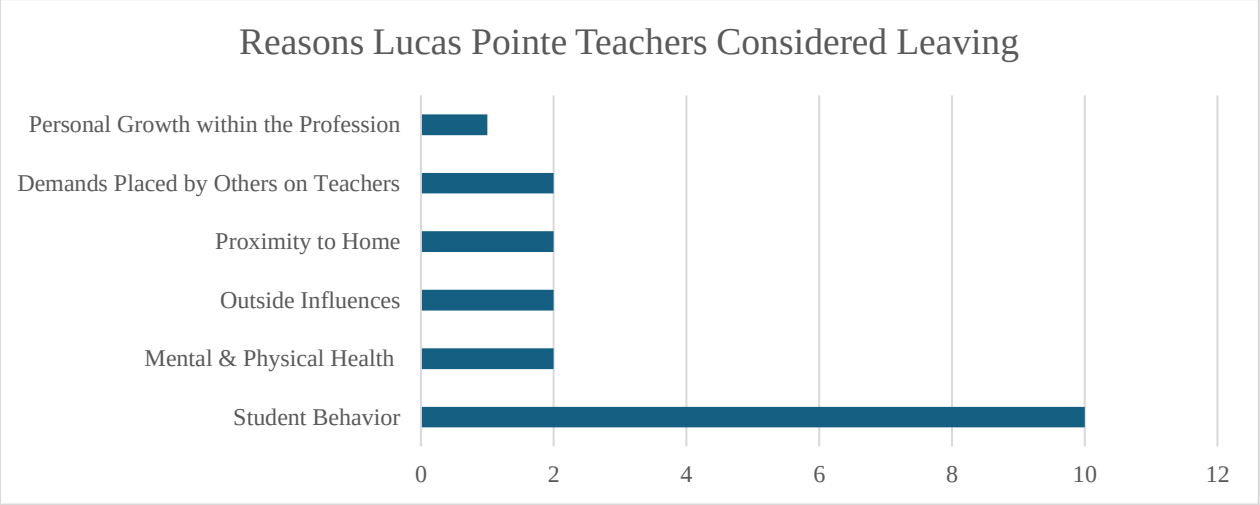
have plenty of opportunities to enjoy the outdoors regardless of socio-economic status. Driving the area provides a clear picture of this area being populated by “the haves AND the have-nots.”

There is an immense distinction between the areas of generational poverty and the areas of great wealth. Some roads lead to estates with million-dollar homes or extensive farms, while others are unpaved turnoffs leading to run-down trailers, chicken houses, or campers housing multiple families. The vast socio-economic differences in the Lucas Pointe community require the staff to create meaningful connections based on authentic understanding and not assumptions. Some students come to school with adverse childhood experiences or limited exposure to behavioral expectations. Some families have had negative school experiences, leading to a lack of trust or motivation to partner with school staff. These invisible things that students bring to school demand much time and attention from the Lucas Pointe staff.

Seventeen certified staff members participated in stay interviews during the spring of 2023 to gain insight into the elements of the school culture that positively impacted teacher retention. The stay interview data identified that a majority of the staff interviewed remained at the school because of the culture of positive relationships with peers, administrators, and students. However, 11 of the 17 teachers interviewed reported considering leaving the school within the last two years. Figure 4.2 represents the reasons Lucas Pointe staff shared for considering leaving the school.

Figure 4.2

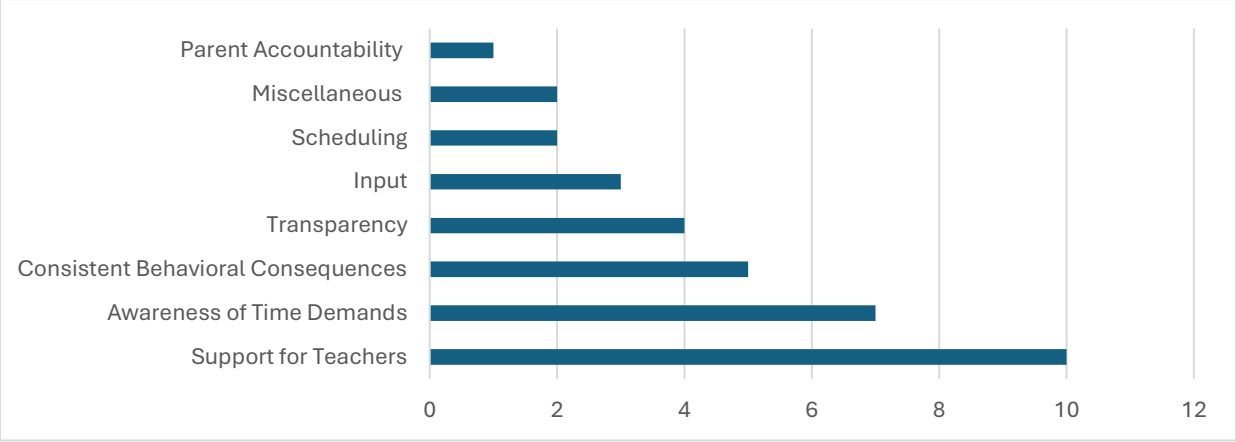
Question 5 from Lucas Pointe Stay Interviews (Spring 2023)



Understanding the negating factors of teacher retention at Lucas Pointe helped develop an understanding of the challenges they faced and target support efforts. Like most Allan County School District (ACSD, a pseudonym) schools, rising frustration with student behavior was noted. The next question of the survey, shown in Figure 4.3, was able to glean insight into how administrators could increase the likelihood that teachers would remain at LPES.

Figure 4.3

Question 6 from Lucas Pointe Stay Interviews (Spring 2023)

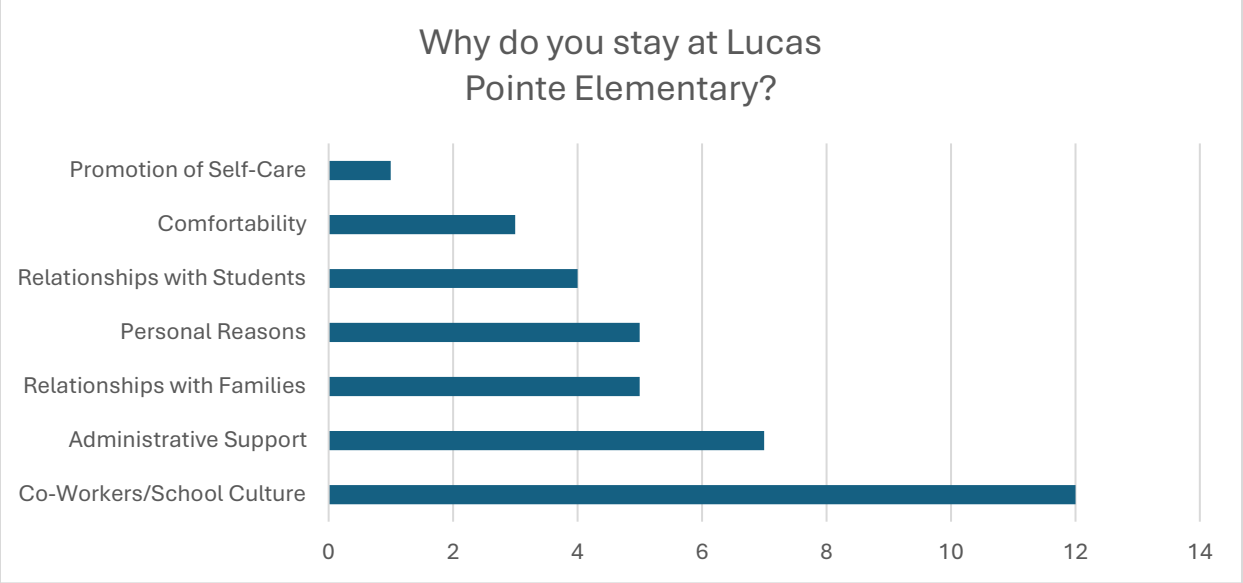


The responses to questions 5 and 6 showed that teachers needed additional support to deal with student behaviors to feel satisfied with their careers. The researcher noted that the Lucas Pointe staff did not prioritize factors outside their control as the most significant influence on their job satisfaction. Parent accountability and schedules ranked low compared to administrator awareness of time demands and support.

In addition to investigating challenges teachers face and the impact on their mindset, the Spring 2023 stay interview sought to determine why staff continued to remain at LPES. Figure 4.4 charts the range of factors positively impacting teacher retention.

Figure 4.4

Question 7 from Lucas Pointe Stay Interviews (Spring 2023)



Data strongly indicated that the LPES staff stayed because of the positive school culture. The second highest factor for retention was administrative support. This led the researcher to wonder if administrative support is ranked high among reasons to stay at Lucas Pointe, but support for teachers was listed as the number one thing administration could do to increase teacher job satisfaction; what other types of support are teachers looking for, and who could

provide them? This question persisted as the researcher considered whom to assemble on an Action Research Implementation Team (ARIT).

This action research study was designed to investigate and design specific supports described by teachers in the post-pandemic era and compensate for the support gap leading to teacher attrition at LPES. The study began in May 2024 after receiving ACSD approval in January 2024 and university IRB approval in March 2024. The study concluded in November 2024 after three iterative cycles of action research. The researcher began by recruiting members of the design and implementation teams.

Action Research Implementation Team

Before the action research study began, the researcher met with a grade-level leader each month to discuss goals and needs. During this time, the researcher provided candid leadership strategies for the grade chairs to support their teams. This structure became a safe space for leaders to collaborate, learn from the experiences of their peers, and be vulnerable. As the researcher considered the time needed for the work of the implementation team, this structure was a logical fit.

To provide a thinking partner for each grade-level guiding coalition leader, the researcher also invited the grade-level collaborative team leaders to participate. Additionally, the researcher invited two other school-wide leaders to join in the action research implementation. These members had a school-wide perspective, which was necessary for the team to engage in comparative conversations. The researcher invited implementation team members through an email describing the study, the requirements for participation, and a copy of the consent form (Appendix F). A 5th-grade collaborative team leader declined the invitation. After reflecting on

the time requirements, she indicated that participation would be outside her commitment boundaries. Table 4.1 details the experience and roles of the ARIT members.

Table 4.1

Action Research Implementation Team (ARIT)

Team Member	Primary Role at Lucas Pointe Elementary	Staff Supported	Experience
Mrs. Fane Austin	3rd Grade Collaborative Team Leader	10 Third-Grade Teachers	14 years of teaching experience, 1st year as 3rd Grade Leader
Ms. Ruby Blackwell	3rd Grade Guiding Coalition Leader	10 Third-Grade Teachers	9 years of teaching experience, 2nd year as a 3rd Grade Leader
Mrs. Imala Mato	4th Grade Collaborative Team Leader	9 Fourth-Grade Teachers	16 years of teaching experience, 1st year as a 4th Grade Leader
Mrs. Gracen Thomas	4th Grade Guiding Coalition Leader	9 Fourth-Grade Teachers	16 years of teaching experience, 3rd year as 4th Grade Leader
Ms. Fallon Waite	5th Grade Guiding Coalition Leader	8 Fifth-Grade Teachers	9 years of teaching experience, 1st year as 5th Grade Leader
Mrs. Brooke Light	Special Education Department Leader	19 Special Education Teachers and 12 Special Education Paraprofessionals	30 years of teaching experience, 7th year as the SPED Department Leader
Mrs. Leslie Rally	Educational Technology Coach	140 Staff Members	28 years of teaching experience, 7th year as Ed. Tech. Coach
Primary Researcher	Assistant Principal	140 Staff Members	18 years of experience in education, 6 years of experience in administration

Action Research Design Team

After extending in-person participation invitations to potential Action Research Design Team (ARDT) members, the researcher emailed the potential ARDT members the study description, the participation requirements, and a copy of the consent form (Appendix G). The potential ARDT members accepted the original invitations, and each member signed the consent form. A retired principal, one teacher leader, a district leader, and another assistant principal joined the primary researcher in designing this action research study as the ARDT. All members possessed significant experience as educators and school leaders. Table 4.2 details the connection of each member to LPES and their role in influencing the study.

Table 4.2

Action Research Design Team

Team Member	Primary Role at Lucas Pointe Elementary	Action Research Role
Primary Researcher	Assistant Principal Grades 3-5, LPES	Leader of research and data analysis for the Design Team, 18 years of experience in education, six years of experience in administration
Dr. Trina Oliver	Retired Principal of LPES	Provided leadership development expertise and an action research perspective, 38 years of experience in education, including 13 as principal of LPES.
Mrs. Lucy Boling	2nd Grade Team Leader, LPES	Provided teacher leader lens of support implementation, 13 years of experience in education, including two as a grade-level leader.
Dr. Sinclair Alethea	Former Induction and Alternative Certification	Provided knowledge of creating district-wide support structures differentiated by school context and experience

Team Member	Primary Role at Lucas Pointe Elementary	Action Research Role
	Program Director for Allan County School District	with action research, 15 years of experience in education, including three years in the human resources department.
Dr. Leigh Mills	Assistant Principal at neighboring middle school	Provided understanding of the context and challenges faced by teachers and leaders at LPES, five years of experience in school leadership

During this study, the primary researcher had served as an assistant principal at LPES for six years. Before becoming the assistant principal, she had served the school as an instructional coach, gifted coordinator, and Title 1 Support teacher for all grade levels. She had a vested interest in improving the supportive practices of school leaders to enhance the teacher morale and positive culture she supervised. As a member of this school context for thirteen years, she had a unique perspective on potential roadblocks during study development.

A recently retired principal, Dr. Trina Oliver, was included in the ARDT due to her 37 years of education experience, 13 years as principal of LPES, and significant knowledge of developing leaders through coaching. She was very familiar with the action research process as a professor of doctoral-level courses at a local university. The researcher had worked closely with the outgoing principal for the last 13 years to support the LPES staff. Mrs. Lucy Bound, the 2nd grade team leader, understood the dynamics between administrators and teachers in this context. She was known for providing high-quality feedback and framing change with positivity. Her team had the highest morale at LPES, and she had shown evidence of personal resilience through difficult circumstances.

Also essential to the ARDT was a former ACSD human resources department employee, Dr. Sinclair Alethea. She previously was the director of system-wide teacher Induction and Alternative Certification programs. She deeply understood teacher support structures and the action research cycle from her recent doctoral program completion. Dr. Leigh Mills was selected as a member of the ARDT for her deep understanding of the context of the study and the teacher challenges in this context. She served as an assistant principal in the middle school fed by LPES. She had also recently completed action research and provided great insight into planning the interventions.

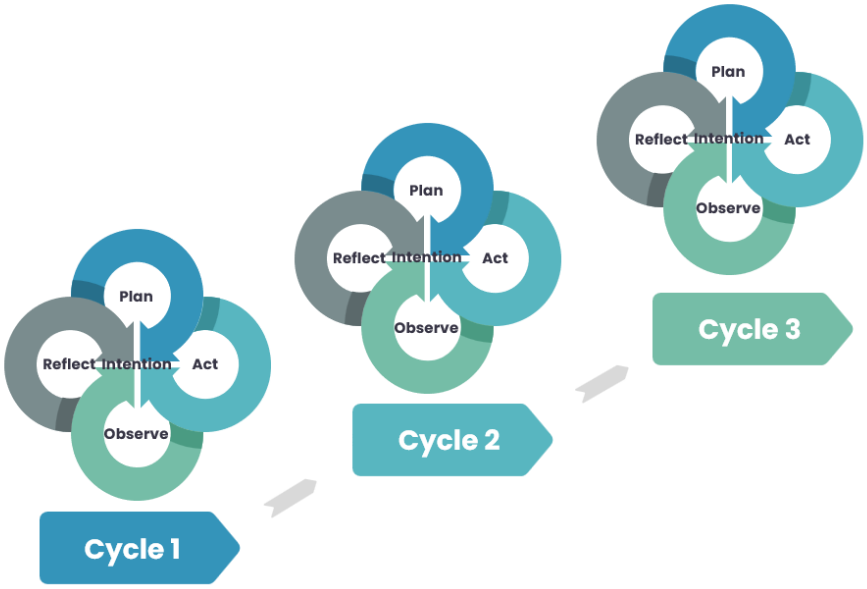
It is important to note that the action research cycles occurred during a principal transition at LPES. The researcher did not invite the incoming principal to join the ARDT for multiple reasons. The new principal had limited knowledge of the school context data, problem of practice, and culture due to only being in the position for a few months. Her lens of leadership during her first year as the principal was as a learner, and her time was prioritized for building relationships. The researcher was also concerned that the presence of the outgoing and incoming principals on the design team would inhibit open discussion due to apprehensions about potentially undermining their contributions to the school.

Findings from the Case

The purpose of the action research case study was to determine the impact of differentiated social supports on the resilience and self-efficacy of teachers in one elementary school setting. The ARDT relied on the iterative cycles of action research to reflect on context specific data, plan and implement interventions, and observe the results. Figure 4.5 provides a visual representation of this work.

Figure 4.5

The Spiraling Nature of Action Research



Note. Adapted from Coghlan (2019) Spiral of Action Research Cycles

The ARIT collaborated to develop the design of the interventions to target the specific needs of the teachers they served. Each cycle provided opportunities for the ARIT to refine the interventions to increase feelings of resilience and self-efficacy among their team members.

The ARDT, which included the researcher, analyzed data collected throughout the cycles to determine the case's findings. The following is a narrative of the three action research cycles told through a reflective process.

Action Research Cycle 1

Cycle One began in late May 2024 and extended through the end of August 2024, with the summer vacation period of the school year occurring in June and partially in July. Components of the first cycle were:

- Pre-Cycle Individual Interviews of School Leaders

- ARDT Orientation
- Administration of the Teacher Support Survey
- ARIT Focus Group

Pre-Cycle Individual Interviews of School Leaders

As the 2023-2024 school year ended and team leaders for each department and grade level were solidified at LPES, the researcher met with each ARIT member to conduct a pre-cycle interview. These interviews took place off campus at a coffee shop to promote a safe space and reduce the likelihood that the ARIT members felt the researcher was in an evaluative role.

The researcher noted that six of seven interviewees seemed comfortable and conversational during the interviews. One team member responded with answers that the researcher perceived as less personal. She was a new leader and had not yet developed a strong working relationship with the researcher. The researcher sensed that this team member wanted to provide a "correct" answer. The interview included open-ended questions and allowed for deviation when interviewee answers moved into topics not directly aligned with the study. All interviews were recorded using an online program, Otter.ai. A complete list of the Pre-Cycle interview questions can be found in Appendix C.

Upon completion of the Pre-Cycle interviews, the researcher reviewed each transcript to ensure accuracy and provided a copy to the interviewee for member checking. When accuracy was determined, the researcher printed transcripts with a wide, right margin for memoing and then reread the transcripts three times. During the first reading, the researcher highlighted statements of interest. During the second reading, the researcher recorded a summary of each response by question number in the researcher's journal. The final reading involved tagging and coding the transcripts with keywords.

Many commonalities emerged from the pre-cycle interview data. When asked to share new challenges presented to teachers since the COVID-19 pandemic, six of the seven ARIT members discussed the widening of academic gaps and the decrease in student social skills. Three members communicated a lack of resilience in students, specifically their ability to persevere through academic challenges. Fallon Waite, 5th grade guiding coalition leader, best communicated these thoughts.

> *You used to see one to two students who were one or two years behind; that gap has grown even wider. One of the biggest challenges we face is how to meet the growing needs of all of our learners. These students missed out on developmental milestones in younger grades, so the academic and behavioral gap has significantly widened.*

Similarly, Imala Mato, 4th-grade Collaborative Team Leader, shared the additional challenge of trying to instruct in the post-pandemic era:

> *We gave a lot of grace to children, knowing they had missed valuable face-to-face time with teachers and peers. Now that those expectations are starting to build back, there's some resistance to that. Student resilience is different.*

Six of the interview questions asked school leaders to describe elements of support. The participants explained personal and team definitions, examples of supportive actions that led to success, and experiences supporting team members. The researcher categorized much of the analyzed dialogue into four main components: Inform, Listen, Advise, and Trust. The responses demonstrated that teachers felt most supported when those four things were provided as a supportive cycle. Gracen Thomas outlined the initial phase of the cycle:

> *Communication and clarity was always helpful to me* (sic)*. When I feel like I know all of the information and leaders give it to me clearly, then I know what to expect. I know what*

> *to do. A lot of teachers are very organized. Having a plan for everything helps me to stay on track and keeps me from feeling overwhelmed.*

Brooke Light also reported the positive impact of clear information from school leaders by stating, *"When the vision and clear goals are given at the start of the year, it helps us stay focused, and we can always come back to that."* Fane Austin described scenarios where the application of the following two components of support, 'Listen and Advise', could be applied:

> *Whenever I've had to go to school leadership to ask, 'How do I deal with this kid's behavior?' or 'What do I need?' or 'What's the next step?' or 'How do I deal with this parent?', I've always felt supported. They provide assistance from their toolbox to help with the situation instead of just telling me to figure it out. I appreciate that kind of support because it means that if I share a situation and you offer advice, you'll have my back if it doesn't work out. That's important.*

Trust was woven into the thoughts of most ARIT members. The connection between each phase of the support cycle gleaned from the Pre-Cycle Interviews was best communicated by Leslie Rally:

> *What has been helpful to me from school leaders was when they give me guidelines for what it is I'm being asked to do, and then I'm given freedom to do the things the way I would feel is best to do them…being able to touch base with them throughout the process, and then being able to reflect on things that went well, and things that maybe I should have done better*.

The researcher saw connections between the examples of support shared and feelings of empowerment by the ARIT members.

When ARIT members described their preparedness to support the teachers they led, each attributed strong personal relationships to their confidence. It was clear to the researcher that the school leaders saw that connection as the foundation for all other supportive measures. Leslie Rally described the positive impact of starting with relationships:

> *I'm friends with teachers in the school, but they respect me as a professional and as an educator. We have a relationship, so they are open to support from me. A lot of times I'm able to deliver information that may not be as well received from another person that they do not have a good rapport with.*

Fallon Waite expressed the impact of trusting relationships:

> *What makes us strong is that I have personal relationships with my teammates. I feel like we've got a dynamic where we support each other professionally because there's also a relationship at the personal level, which just makes you that much more comfortable to lean on each other and ask each other questions.*

While each interviewee evidenced confidence in supporting their teammates, they also expressed a matching struggle. The researcher identified that the biggest challenge to supporting LPES teachers centered on the differentiated needs and unique personalities of their teammates. This type of support requires considerable time, reflection, and planning. Ruby Blackwell, 3rd grade Guiding Coalition Leader, supported the largest grade level team at LPES. Her words articulated how varied the needs of a team can be.

> *Almost everybody would have a different definition of support. There's three teachers that are coming to a new grade level to the might need support walking through third grade standards* (sic)*. For the teacher that has never taught before, her definition might be more related to survival. Your first year, you need support, advice, and an advocate*

> *for everything. Some of the other team members have worked together before and I think they just kind of need me to have their back.*

Gracen Thomas shared her organic process of getting to know her team and determining how they perceive support.

> *You have to get to know them. Notice the things that they do. A lot of times that's something they obviously value. When you get it right (support), they kind of light up a lot more…I have to learn what they value and what kind of relationship works for them, what they need, and what they don't need. I need all the information. That makes me feel good because I'm organized. Some people don't need all the information right away because it overwhelms them, causes stress and worry.*

Leslie Rally discussed the varied types of support requested by teachers at LPES and shared that the differences in teachers create a challenge for leaders.

> *That's what makes it so hard to lead. You do have such extremes from one end to the other of how different people need to be supported. That's the difficult part. Everybody needs different layers and types of support. That is the struggle.*

A summary of the interviews was created for presentation to the ARDT.

Action Research Design Team (ARDT) Orientation

The initial ARDT meeting took place on July 25th. This was the second day all staff returned on contract after summer vacation. Since most of the team operated from different locations that day, the team assembled virtually through Microsoft Teams. The researcher recorded the meeting using Otter.ai. During this session, the researcher shared the significance of selecting each participant and the perspective the researcher hoped to gain with their inclusion.

The researcher provided context-specific data to orient the team to the action research setting. Additionally, the researcher shared a thorough description of the theoretical framework, the research questions, and a substantial review of previous literature to define the need for the study. All ARDT members were familiar with transformational leadership theory, but several asked for more information on the social support theory. The researcher provided an infographic to each team member to support understanding of how each component was adapted and would be used to situate the action research. The team was also provided with an infographic on the social support theory. Dr. Oliver related the social support theory to how individuals take their coffee, which cemented understanding.

The researcher used the second half of the ARDT meeting for an open discussion of the planned first intervention cycle. The researcher described the monthly meeting structure for a small group of school leaders and how this would provide professional learning time to support the intervention implementation. Dr. Alethea encouraged the researcher to investigate the differences between the number of content areas taught by each ARIT member and the different impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on varied grade levels. Mrs. Boling advised on how the researcher could approach observation without limiting the authentic collaboration of each team during the intervention.

The researcher also summarized the pre-cycle interviews and the ARDT shared the main similarities between the conversations. The researcher then shared the adapted versions of the Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC), Teacher Self-Efficacy Scale (TSES), and Teacher Support Survey (TSS) as data collection tools (Appendix A). After the discussion, Dr. Oliver reminded the group that the timing of the study could impact the data collected in the study.

> *I think people say August is very hopeful, and people are rested, so there's sort of this pie-in-the-sky sort of feeling. But, then by October, you get everyone trying to do report cards, conferences, feeling a little ground down. You might see that when you are surveying.*

Dr. Mills echoed the same thoughts.

> *I think you're going to hit something really big based on the time of year you are giving your pre-and post-survey. In August, people are sitting in PD seriously taking notes, and they're super engaged. I guarantee you in October, we're going to have a completely different response. Then it's game time. People are drowning, and their pants are on fire. You're going to hit on that.*

The first ARDT meeting concluded with a plan to reconvene at the end of the first cycle.

Action Research Implementation Team (ARIT) Focus Group

The ARIT focus group convened in the researcher's office on the second day of school. For a Friday afternoon, energy was high, and team members seemed eager to participate. As the focus group members entered, they were seated at a round table and, after a brief social exchange, were asked to engage in reading snippets of text and reflect on how they could be connected. The activity matched excerpts from teacher resignation letters in the last ten years to captions describing previous experiences and the result of the letter. As the matches were made, the mood shifted. Leslie Rally captured the thoughts of the group.

> *These are not bad teachers. They're distraught. They're devastated with the way that things are. They are not able to do it because they're being asked to do what they know isn't best. These are people that went into teaching expecting to stay further.*
>
> *They aren't able to deal with the pressures.*

Ruby Blackwell added*, "They are not very angry. They just seem helpless."*

The researcher felt that this activity provided the groundwork for the ARIT to understand the essence of teacher demoralization. Burnout was often used to describe some teachers leaving education, but demoralization was a new view for the group.

This activity was a springboard for revealing the problem of practice that the ARIT would target over the next three months. The researcher shared context-specific data visually representing teacher attrition at LPES. Brooke Light, a 30-year veteran teacher at LPES, appeared shocked by the numbers and later commented that she did not realize how much turnover had occurred in the last five years. The researcher also took time to present the findings from the reviewed literature on how teacher needs have changed since the COVID-19 pandemic.

An entry point for action was presented to the ARIT. As the researcher thoroughly reviewed the theoretical framework, the ARIT was encouraged to use it as a figurative lens for leadership during the study. Each member received an infographic outlining the four types of social support. The researcher asked team members to be mindful of instances where they felt teachers needed social support or situations where they applied a type of social support.

The ARIT reviewed each component of the initial teacher survey. Discussion followed among team members, sharing their experiences and encouraging teachers on their team to complete the survey. Many had shared with team members that they would use the data as a baseline for supporting them during this school year. The ARIT then took time to engage in conversation around the following questions:

1. What do you wonder? What needs to be clarified?
2. What do you need? What are your hopes?
3. What are the big rocks? Areas of support?

4. What are our action steps?
5. What are your predictions?
6. How should we structure communication in between meetings?

It was clear that each leader was excited to get to know their team through the analysis of survey data. The researcher was motivated by the enthusiasm team members demonstrated. Fallon Waite asked when the team should anticipate the survey data to be shared.

> *I'm eager to see what fifth grade's responses are going to look like. You think you know how people want to be supported, but in reality, when they articulate it, it could be different.*

She awaited the results of the survey with trepidation, explaining, *"I'm kind of anxious to see the big rocks. What things are in our control, and what is out of our control."*

After the focus group session, Leslie Rally told the researcher that it would be *"nice for each ARIT member to have a notebook to compile all of the resources and data from the action research for reference."* Leslie was a galvanizer, and this idea validated her inclusion on the implementation team. The researcher probed further on how she envisioned using the notebook. As a school-wide leader, Leslie was interested in keeping the needs of each team in mind when reflecting and planning for professional development. The researcher presented the data to each ARIT member in a leadership notebook.

Administration of the Teacher Surveys

At the start of each school year, the administrators and instructional coaches ask that teachers complete a survey to gain a baseline for the school climate and assess professional learning needs. The initial survey, sent as an email, included these opening remarks:

As much as your students look forward to getting to know you, the leadership team at Lucas Pointe looks forward to getting to know you too! Thank you for taking the survey below to provide insight to school leaders on how we can best support your team this year. All information collected will be anonymous and used to prioritize supportive measures. In this survey, a "school leader" is defined as any staff member who supports and guides other staff members.

The survey included items directly linked to the action research case study and adaptations of the Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC) and Teacher Self-Efficacy Scale (TSES). A complete version of the survey is in Appendix B.

The survey yielded a 92% response rate from teachers. The survey closed on August 5th, and the researcher organized and provided the data to ARIT members on August 9th in the leadership notebook and divided by grade level or department into four categories: Social Support Priorities, Teacher Self-Efficacy, Teacher Resilience, and Teacher Support Definitions. The researcher used an online graphics program, Canva, to create visually engaging charts and graphs for each data set. The visualization helped each school leader use the data to understand their team's needs and priorities deeply.

The first section of the teacher support survey asked teachers to rank the supportive measures in order of how they positively impact their success. Each statement was directly aligned with one of the four types of social support. The results are outlined in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3

Pre-cycle Social Support Priorities

Survey Group	Highest Priority	Lowest Priority
SPED	Instrumental	Appraisal
5th Grade	Informational	Appraisal

Survey Group	Highest Priority	Lowest Priority
4th Grade	Emotional	Instrumental
3rd Grade	Emotional	Instrumental
Lucas Pointe Teachers	Informational	Instrumental

The second section of the survey assessed teacher self-efficacy and resilience factors using a five-point Likert scale. The Teacher Self-Efficacy Scale measured confidence in handling various factors, ranging from 'Not at All' to 'A Great Deal.' Twelve items were rated across three areas: Instructional Strategies, Student Management, and Student Engagement. The Teacher Resilience Scale evaluated how often certain statements described the respondents, from 'Never True' to 'True Nearly All the Time.' Twenty items were rated in five categories: Personal Competencies and Persistence, Trust, Positive Acceptance, Control, and Spiritual Influences.

Tables 4.4 and 4.5 present the average scores for each group and their highest and lowest-rated factors. While 4th-grade teachers demonstrated the highest confidence, 3rd-grade teachers ranked highest in resilience factors. Fifth-grade teachers reported significantly lower confidence compared to the other groups. Special education resource teachers rated resilience factors the lowest, especially considering this group faces the most challenging circumstances at LPES. They were involved with the crisis response team and served the highest-risk students.

Table 4.4

Pre-cycle Self-Efficacy Ratings

Survey Group	Average	Highest Rated Factors	Lowest Rated Factors
SPED	4.27381	Student Management	Student Engagement
5th Grade	4.011904	Instructional Strategies	Student Engagement
4th Grade	4.333333	Student Management	Student Management
3rd Grade	4.297619	Student Engagement	Student Management
Lucas Pointe Teachers	4.229166		

Table 4.5

Pre-cycle Resilience Ratings

Survey Group	Average	Highest Rated Factors	Lowest Rated Factors
SPED	4.257142	Spiritual Influences	Trust
5th Grade	4.471429	Personal Competence	Control
4th Grade	4.261111	Positive Acceptance	Trust
3rd Grade	4.671429	Positive Acceptance	Trust
Lucas Pointe Teachers	4.415278		

Several questions emerged as the researcher reflected on the data collected from the initial pre-cycle teacher surveys. Could the factors rated as the lowest impact those rated as the highest? For instance, fifth-grade teachers reported low confidence in engaging students while expressing high confidence in planning instructional strategies. Might the latter be a response to the former? Additionally, could teacher confidence be influenced by the age of the students? In third and fourth grades, content rigor increases, and students may begin to exhibit behavioral issues. Could this lead to lower self-efficacy scores in student management? In fifth grade, some students may find learning too challenging, leading to decreased motivation. Might this affect self-efficacy scores in student engagement? These questions were documented in the researcher's journal and prioritized for discussion with the ARDT in Cycle Two.

Action Research Cycle 2

Reflection and Planning with the Action Research Design Team (ARDT)

Before the conclusion of Cycle One, the ARDT met virtually to review the first focus group meeting. They shared observations made during this cycle and gathered feedback to improve the intervention for Cycle Two. The researcher referred to the first intervention cycle as the "Awareness Phase." Dr. Trina Oliver reframed the shock felt by the ARIT when discussing

attrition data at LPES. After leading the school for over 13 years, she acknowledged how easily misperceptions can arise from numbers.

> *They want to know why, and there are so many reasons. Often, it's not the first explanation that comes to mind; it's not the most obvious. It just is what it is. In some ways, you've got to respond to it, right?*

The researcher outlined the focus group components as the foundation for building the capacity for the implementation team to understand social support. Emphasis was placed on the intent of the first focus group, which was to create a "Lens to Lead." The ARDT members encouraged the researcher to have the implementation team make critical decisions to guide the research, emphasizing the importance of each leader determining what that looked like for their team. Lucy Boling, a grade-level leader on the ARDT, suggested that each leader should have access to data from other teams. Dr. Leigh Mills affirmed her suggestion by stating:

> *Oftentimes, we are reinventing the wheel over and over again when someone in our building is doing a jam-up job. A teacher doesn't necessarily feel comfortable going to someone at another grade level, but maybe the team leader does…What are you guys doing for X, Y, Z?*

The researcher agreed that by facilitating access to shared data and encouraging open communication, the implementation team could leverage the successes of other teams, ultimately enhancing their collective impact on their teams.

The ARDT expressed interest in how the researcher perceived the Teacher Support Survey data, explicitly asking if the researcher felt the results accurately reflected the needs of each team. The researcher responded,

> *They are pretty dead on, but there could always be some influence in areas such as, 'Do you feel supported by your admin?'. Everybody wants to please, you know? In the narratives that they (the teachers) were writing, I really felt like the things that I have heard, as far as either concerns, or frustrations, or needs in the past, were coming through in those answers.*

As an LPES teaching staff member, Leigh Boling shared, *"I don't think that the people in third, fourth, or fifth would hold back their honest opinions about things…I think they are pretty forthcoming with you.* The researcher admitted that there was data correlated with dissatisfaction with the support provided to a 5th-grade teacher by the administration. Dr. Oliver commented, *"That is a shout-out to honesty."* The ARDT members valued the approach of building knowledge in the initial cycle, as it provided the ARIT with a fresh perspective on leadership. The ARDT was particularly eager to see how the leadership lens of social support would influence the Teacher Support Survey data.

The researcher shared several observations from the first cycle. One notable example involved Fallon Waite and her team during a meeting with the LPES instructional coach. As the coach presented information about a new assessment tool, Fallon interrupted and asked the instructional coach to pause and clarify the timing and procedural logistics for utilizing the new assessment tool. Her teammates responded with a look of relief and reengaged with the presentation. After the meeting, the researcher asked Fallon to talk more about the interaction. She explained that she noticed her teammates becoming disengaged and chatting with their neighbors while the coach presented the capabilities and research behind using the assessment tool. Knowing that her team appreciates the provision of informational support, she felt they

needed to know the logistics of the application before engaging in new learning. This would ensure they were focused on the presentation.

In the same presentation, Ruby Blackwell took an opportunity to support the emotional needs of her team by sharing a personal experience using the new assessment tool in another context. Her enthusiasm and positive review of the tool fostered buy-in from her team, who seemed more confident about moving forward with the tool. She later shared with the researcher that her team often seeks reassurance.

The ARDT concluded their session by discussing intervention improvements that could increase the impact of the focus group. They suggested that the researcher consider ways to empower the ARIT to make some critical decisions regarding how they use the information presented or the direction they would like to take with the support application. These discussions emphasized the connection between leaders applying new skills and their ability to reflect on team interactions.

Dr. Trina Oliver summarized the conversation on developing a leader reflection template, proposing it could take the form of a meeting log or journal that could include what happened, strengths and weaknesses, challenges faced by the leader, responses to those challenges, and any new skills applied. The researcher recorded these ideas and presented them to some implementation team members for feedback.

Action Research Implementation Team (ARIT) Focus Group

The second ARIT meeting was held in person on September 4th. Team members brought their new leadership notebook, which the researcher had provided. Each notebook contained infographics shared at the first ARIT focus group and data from the Teacher Support Survey specific to the leader's team. Time was provided at the beginning of the focus group for each

leader to analyze their data using a reflection template. The purpose of the template was to narrow the data review. A copy of the complete template is provided in Appendix H. Each leader noted team priorities, strengths, and weaknesses as they considered how this data could influence their next steps.

ARIT members seemed comfortable discussing their data with other leaders. The engaging conversation continued for over twenty minutes as leaders compared data, asked questions of other team members, and reflected on their initial thoughts of what led to the responses provided by the teachers. When reviewing her data, Gracen Thomas reflected on the possible influence of her personality on her leadership style.

> *My team's biggest priority is what I don't feel. Emotional. I'm not emotionless, but my husband and I joke about this all the time. He is way more the emotional type. I'm caring, but I guess that's just not as important to me.*

After the data analysis, each leader was asked to share anything significant or surprising. The researcher charted these findings on a whiteboard so that the team had a visual to use for connections. The researcher also used these findings in conjunction with the teacher support definitions to create a message that attempted to add voice to each team's supportive needs. The researcher shared these messages with the ARIT in an email after the meeting, and they are included in Table 4.6.

Table 4.6

Team Messages as Deduced from Data from the Teacher Support Survey

Grade	Comment
3rd Grade	"Be there for me. Reassure me I'm on the right track."
4th Grade	"Be unified with me. We work better together."

Grade	Comment
5th Grade	"Hear my voice. I have a valuable perspective."
SPED	"Fill my toolbox. My heart is already full."

The researcher synthesized the reflections of the team, which highlighted the challenge of applying social support within team dynamics,

> *That nails the challenge when you're leading a team. You can try to generalize support, but you're always leaving somebody out. You're always going to be doing something in a way that somebody isn't connecting with. This really validates what you all said about knowing your people, knowing what they need, and what type of support they value. This session has helped us narrow our focus.*

The next portion of the focus group focused on exploring the four types of social support. The ARDT tasked leaders with reviewing various leadership actions and sorting them into the four social support categories. The researcher intentionally refrained from validating the placement of any items, encouraging open discussion around the categories during the activity. This led to some leaders discovering that certain items could fit into multiple categories. A debate emerged around distinguishing between providing information and when that information would be considered a tool (instrument). The ARIT members noted that items related to providing positive feedback could sometimes be categorized as appraisal and other times as under emotional support.

At the end of the activity, the team had a few lingering items that did not fit neatly into any category. Imala Mato paraphrased the discussion about these leftover items*, "These (items placed under categories) are all supports applied, provided for, or to people. Whereas, being heard is an outlet."*

Fallon Waite elaborated on the items the team found difficult to categorize.

> *We see teacher voice in being heard. Like when decisions are made, get my perspective, or get a perspective of someone like me. Give us space to share our perspective and our thoughts versus decision just being made for us. Being trusted to do their job.*

Ultimately, the ARIT recognized that these supportive actions were closely tied to the individualization component of transformational leaders. The researcher reminded the group that this type of support was reflected in the personal definitions of support teachers in the Teacher Support Survey.

The focus group concluded with the researcher requesting a call to action by asking each leader to articulate two commitments to prioritize in Cycle Two, explicitly targeting the support priorities highlighted in their data. The leaders shared these commitments amongst the group, and the researcher recorded them for follow-up throughout the cycle. The researcher observed that several members successfully linked their commitments to specific needs expressed in the Teacher Support Survey.

Action Research Cycle 3

Reflection and Planning with the Action Research Design Team (ARDT)

The ARDT met virtually on September 23rd to plan the third action research cycle. This meeting took place during a pre-scheduled week-long fall break. Dr. Leigh Mills was out of town and unable to attend the meeting. The researcher shared an overview of the second cycle, including the commitments made by the ARIT, and expressed gratitude to the ARDT for encouraging opportunities for the ARIT to have more ownership over the intervention.

The ARDT reviewed the highlights of the discussion and noted that ARIT leaders who naturally excelled at applying a particular type of social support were finding they had to

prioritize it less. This suggested that the support types that come naturally to the leaders required less planning. The ARDT also discussed how team dynamics and composition could require a shift in support from year to year. Dr. Trina Oliver shared her experience with leader agility, noting that support must be reassessed when there are significant changes in the team, such as a shift in personnel or a team member experiencing a personal crisis. She suggested*, "If you had a whole bunch of new people on your team, or if somebody went through a divorce, you would be totally rethinking your leadership."*

Next, the researcher relayed her thoughts on postponing the Leader Reflection Log until the third cycle. October was a period of disillusionment for most teachers. The initial excitement of the school year had faded, and the workload began to peak with the grading, reporting, and family conference deadlines. Student behaviors also began spiking during this season as they tested initial boundaries. Knowing that the third cycle would take place during October, the researcher felt that the ARIT would be more likely to maintain fidelity to their commitments if they did not need to prioritize the reflection.

The researcher shared with the group a conversation with Fallon Waite after the ARIT focus group, during which the researcher asked for feedback on the first draft of the reflection template. Fallon suggested making the template less complex and sparking deeper reflection through specific scenarios. Lucy Boling emphasized the importance of not allowing the data collection method to decrease the gathering of valuable information by speculating:

> *You're definitely going to get a shorter answer if they are handwriting it, but if you put it in a Google survey and gave people the chance to type it, I think they would be more extensive. They can delete and rewrite to make sure it's what they're trying to say.*

Dr. Sinclair Alethea encouraged the researcher to leave the reflection response open-ended, stating, *"I would just leave it open, because there's no way you can say, I want you to give me this kind of scenario, and that may not have occurred on that team"*. Dr. Trina Oliver proposed adding a layer of reflection for leaders and pondered, *"I wonder if there are people that are applying (social supports) at home. I wonder if they are applying it with their parent base. I wonder if they are using it in other situations."* The ARDT felt this additional reflection would evidence a leader using social support types more effectively. The researcher worked to refine the Leader Reflection Log based on the feedback of the ARDT.

The meeting concluded with a discussion of the book *Onward* (Aguilar, 2018), which the researcher planned to use in the third cycle to help ARIT members connect to social support and build resilience and confidence. ARDT member Dr. Sinclair Alethea suggested this text, as she had discovered it while leading the ACSD New Educator Induction Program. The ARDT showed interest in the book, particularly the chapters on Organizational Narratives and Building Confidence through Appreciation and Celebration, which were selected to complement the themes of each cycle.

Action Research Implementation Team (ARIT) Focus Group

The ARIT convened for their final focus group on October 9th. This session marked the culmination of discussions aimed at evaluating and refining social supports to foster resilience and self-efficacy in teachers at LPES. Leslie Rally was unable to attend this session due to a family emergency. Her participation decreased during the second and third cycles as she attended to a family crisis. The researcher facilitated a discussion of the progress on specific commitments and supported their team members, highlighting challenges. Time constraints and the impact of conference season were common threads. Grade-level leaders expressed concern over the limited

amount of unstructured time with their teammates. In August 2024, LPES implemented a new twice-weekly collaborative team meeting protocol that left less planning time for teams to connect.

Fallon Waite emphasized how organic connections and effective communication supported her commitment.

> *With the large space between team members and our lack of planning time, I've noticed an improvement in my commitments since being more intentional. I try to cross to the other side of the building at lunch and in the morning to check in with those teachers. A hot topic on our team is just needing time, but there is still so much to be communicated. I've been intentional with sending emails as much as possible, and trusting that the communication is clear and that it's going to be accurately received is more important than take their time.*

Ruby Blackwell shared the results of a check-in Google form used by the third-grade leaders. The responses revealed a mixed feeling of being overwhelmed and a strong interest in team-building activities. Ruby and her 3rd-grade counterpart, Fane Austin, expressed excitement about supporting the identified needs and continuing to use the check-in.

> *We got really good feedback. I kind of thought that people would just be like, "I don't want to do this," "I'm fine," "I'm good," "I don't want to talk about it." People gave some really good feedback and were actually pretty honest. Now we can approach whoever we need to in a calm manner and apply different types of support.*

During the second half of the ARIT focus group, the researcher revealed the purpose of the final action research cycle, using social support to build the resilience and confidence of team members. The ARIT learned together through two excerpts from *Onward: Cultivating Emotional*

Resilience in Educators (Aguilar, 2018). ARIT members were asked to read a text describing organizational narratives and highlight phrases that stood out about building teacher resilience. Four of the seven ARIT members identified the same statement as impactful: "Destructive organizational narratives are tricky because there is usually some truth in what is said, but they are ultimately demoralizing and disconnect us from our power" (Aguilar, 2018, p. 86). Imala Mato shared a personal reflection on the quote, describing how it resonated with her experiences.

> *Weirdly enough, somebody mentioned at a meeting that I hadn't put optimism as one of my thinking talents. I thought that was sweet of them to say that they see me as optimistic. I actually don't think I'm an optimistic person, but if you're not positive, nothing gets done. I like productivity. I 'cup half empty' a lot of things in my mind, but I also recognize the fact that it's not going to help us move forward. The statement made me think of optimism as a byproduct of a desire for productivity.*

Gracen Thomas, another leader of the 4th-grade team, shared a similar sentiment about shifting destructive thinking, which is connected to a different quote from the text: "If you find that you tell destructive or unhelpful stories, then it is your responsibility to shift them" (Aguilar, 2018, p. 87).

> *If you find yourself saying these things or thinking these things, then that's where you have to be the one to stop it or change it. Otherwise, it just builds. If you're speaking about it and someone joins in, that's how it can pile. It's our responsibility as leaders to tell the stories that cultivate resilience, and those stories of resilience are what ultimately serve our students.*

The researcher noted in her journal that this leadership space had significantly impacted Gracen Thomas as she struggled to prevent a destructive narrative from forming on the 4th-grade

team. Within the journal, the researcher connected another quote from the text that affirmed the thinking of the 4th-grade leaders. “Your stories matter the most because they shape the stories that others tell” (Aguilar, 2018, p. 87). This quote prompted the researcher to reflect further, *“Who are your marigolds? Can you be a marigold for someone else? Can you shift their story, because what we hear feeds us, and what we feed grows.”*

The ARIT members took some time to discuss past and current organizational narratives in the context of LPES and narratives explicitly connected to their teams. Fallon Waite discussed the balance between validating truths and not getting stuck in negative narratives.

> *Validating the truth, but not getting stuck on the storyline. I feel like that’s something we have to balance as leaders. If people are writing their narrative and it’s based on truth, and you just totally invalidate and give them a sunshine and rainbow alternative, then you’re not going to be heard or respected or followed. You have to be exact in the balance. You can’t validate them too much, but if you don’t validate it at all, I feel like you lose people.*

After discussing organizational narratives, the ARIT shifted focus to another excerpt from *Onward* (Aguilar, 2018), which explored strategies for building teacher confidence through appreciation and celebration. Many team members pointed out research referenced by Aguilar (2018). The line highlighted the importance of receiving praise in a meaningful way. “Researchers suspect that of those 65% (employees that do not feel appreciated), it’s possible that many do receive praise, but they aren’t able to hear it, or it isn’t delivered in a way and with language that they can register” (Aguilar, 2018, p. 298).

The ARIT discussed the importance of meaningful praise in building confidence and the potential roadblocks some of their team members may face in receiving it. Imala Mato began the

discussion with examples of how some teachers excuse their praise or find it difficult to accept. Ruby Blackwell supported her thoughts by sharing how often team members argue and interrupt praise instead of saying 'thank you.' Fallon Waite connected to this perspective and shared an example from that morning.

> *Yesterday, Bri (a pseudonym) recognized me for standing in the hall and greeting our kids in the morning. Then this morning I had to make a copy, and I thought, 'Oh my gosh, I'm going to let her down because I'm not out in the hall this morning, even though I've been in the hall every other morning. I feel like that's not something we always think about, but that pressure can be a roadblock of praise that some people experience.*

The researcher shared that she had experienced many teachers aligning praise with a new standard or expectation.

The learning time for the ARIT focus group concluded with time for the leaders to reflect on two questions:

1. What narrative are you hearing? Are you using it to empower? When it is negative, are we feeding into it?
2. How can you build confidence in areas rated low by using appreciation and praise?

To conclude the session, the researcher introduced a new tool for ongoing reflection: a weekly Leader Reflection Log. The purpose was to help the team reflect on using social supports in various contexts, including personal and professional relationships.

Reflection with the Action Research Implementation Team (ARIT)

The final meeting of the ARIT took place on November 6th. The researcher summarized the three focus group sessions to prepare the team for collective reflection. Each cycle session was defined by a title: Lens to Lead, Collective Commitments, and Power of Reflection. The

researcher had prepared three discussion topics for the collective reflection on the intervention cycles.

- Describe the journey of this group. What has the process of awareness, application, and reflection been like for you individually and collectively?
- What impacts did this focus group (ARIT) have on your ability to support your team?
- What do you still want to know or learn more about?

The researcher noted commonalities in the responses during the reflective discussion.

Five of the seven team members identified intentionality as their greatest takeaway when describing the three-cycle process. Fallon Waite shared a shift in her approach to supporting her team members.

> *It (this process) definitely made me more aware, and then, because of that awareness, I could be more intentional. In certain situations, I could adapt how I supported them based on the information I had of how they actually perceive support.*

Imala Mato described how the process brought more intention to her planning and reflection.

> *There's probably things that you do as a leader that fell into all of the support categories, but actually being intentional in planning to apply a support or reflecting back on what you have done throughout the week as a leader and assigning it a category allows you to be more intentional, drawing it (support) in to your focus.*

Many of the ARIT members highlighted the positive impact of collaboration. Those with grade-level partners, such as Ruby Blackwell and Fane Austin, shared how working together to support a team of ten third-grade teachers allowed them to plan and hold each other accountable strategically. This partnership strengthened their support efforts and created a sense of shared responsibility. Similarly, other ARIT members appreciated the opportunity to hear about the

challenges and successes experienced by different teams. Imala Mato, for example, expressed gratitude for the transparency and openness of her fellow leaders, particularly when discussing obstacles and brainstorming solutions for adequate support.

Looking ahead, many team members expressed a desire to collect more data on evolving support needs. This interest was driven by a growing recognition that teachers' needs shift throughout the year. As the intervention progressed, many leaders observed an increase in instrumental needs. Fane Austin, for instance, shared her perspective on how this shift might look in the second half of the year:

> *It would be interesting to give the survey again mid-year, now that they've dug themselves out of a hole and are looking towards Milestones (state assessment). Do they need as much emotional support as they did at the beginning of the year? Now, they are more focused on getting all of their content in.*

In addition to gathering data on support needs, Imala Mato suggested that the group explore how the third-grade team uses a digital pulse check tool. The tool had successfully determined the appropriate supportive measures for their team. Ruby Blackwell elaborated on how she and Fane Austin used this tool to prioritize their support efforts effectively. With a large team to manage, the tool allowed them to make informed decisions based on the collective feedback from their team members.

> *Some people just needed a place to vent, and then they felt great, some; didn't understand Benchmark (new curriculum resource), and some just had a bad day with behavior. We were able to check in individually, support, and then go back to check on progress.*

Although all ARIT members intended to continue applying social support to their leadership practices, many noted that balancing this support with their classroom responsibilities posed a significant challenge. Fallon Waite conveyed this tension and her commitment to overcoming the challenge.

> *My biggest struggle is the time. How do you (teacher leader) find time to provide support when a big way people feel supported is by giving them time? I think the work we've done here is valuable and that it should be implemented. How can you do that without the time structured into your day?*

The ARIT members brainstormed ideas for leaders to save time and prioritize support. Many team members felt that the types of social support and examples should be clearly defined so that teachers could articulate their needs efficiently to school leaders. After the ARIT focus group session, the researcher detailed the post-cycle data collection components. ARIT members were asked to select a date and time for their post-cycle interview and to encourage teachers to complete the Quarter 2 Resilience and Self-Efficacy survey.

Administration of the Post-Cycle Teacher Surveys

After the third action research cycle, the researcher sent adaptations of the Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC) and Teacher Self-Efficacy Scale (TSES) as a survey to teachers at LPES. This post-cycle survey did not include original questions for teachers to complete related to their support needs. The survey was sent in an email on November 4th with these opening remarks:

> *Earlier this year, many of you completed a Teacher Support Survey to help guide the efforts of our instructional lead team and CT leaders. To continue building on this work,*

I would greatly appreciate if you could spare five minutes to share additional insights about your resilience and confidence at the start of Q2.

Eighty-six percent of the teachers invited responded by taking the survey. The researcher provided ARIT members with charts and graphs for the Teacher Resilience and Self-Efficacy data sets of their grade or department. Even though the study had concluded, the ARIT were eager to determine the impact of their supportive actions.

The survey assessed Teacher self-efficacy and resilience factors using a five-point Likert scale. The Teacher Self-Efficacy Scale measured confidence in handling various factors, ranging from 'Not at All' to 'A Great Deal.' Twelve items were rated across three areas: Instructional Strategies, Student Management, and Student Engagement. The Teacher Resilience Scale evaluated how often certain statements described the respondents, from 'Never True' to 'True Nearly All the Time.' Twenty items were rated in five categories: Personal Competencies and Persistence, Trust, Positive Acceptance, Control, and Spiritual Influences. Tables 4.7 and 4.8 present the average scores for each group, along with their highest and lowest-rated factors.

Most teams remained similar to pre-cycle ratings, with two exceptions. The 3rd-grade self-efficacy average increased significantly as compared to other teams. The fact that 3rd-grade teachers demonstrated the highest confidence and ranked highest in resilience factors fascinated the researcher. Additionally, the self-efficacy of the special education team decreased significantly more than other teams. The researcher reflected in a journal on the increased frequency of after-school meetings due to rising student behavior challenges in the special education department, which impacted the SPED department chair fully participating in the focus group sessions.

Table 4.7

Post-cycle Self-Efficacy Ratings

Survey Group	Average	% Change	Highest Rated Factors	Lowest Rated Factors
SPED	3.96	-7%	Student Management	Student Engagement
5th Grade	3.9	-3%	Varied	Student Engagement
4th Grade	4.22	-3%	Varied	Student Management
3rd Grade	4.49	+4%	Varied	Student Management
Lucas Pointe Teachers	4.14	-2%		

Table 4.8

Post-cycle Resilience Ratings

Survey Group	Average	% Change	Highest Rated Factors	Lowest Rated Factors
SPED	4.17	-2%	Personal Competence	Trust
5th Grade	4.32	-3%	Personal Competence	Trust
4th Grade	4.22	-1%	Positive Acceptance	Trust
3rd Grade	4.63	-1%	Positive Acceptance	Trust
Lucas Pointe Teachers	4.34	-2%		

The researcher compared the results from the Post-Cycle Teacher Survey to the corresponding data collected before the three action research cycles. While the researcher felt discouraged by the decrease in overall teacher resilience and self-efficacy ratings, the themes that emerged from the qualitative data showed a positive impact from the work of the ARIT.

Chapter Summary

This chapter describes the work of an action research team investigating how differentiated social supports can be applied to elementary school teachers. It began by providing

background on the research site and introducing the members of the ARDT and ARIT. Through their participation in various activities across three action research cycles, the perspectives of these team members helped shape the narrative of the research process.

The design team gathered data through interviews, observations, and surveys to identify areas where support was needed. Based on their findings, they developed interventions to assist school leaders and tracked progress throughout the study. The researcher interviewed ARIT members at the conclusion and collected teacher survey data again to compare with initial results. Several themes emerged as data were collected, analyzed, and coded:

- Low student resilience
- Widening gaps
- Know your people
- Teacher voices
- Intentionality of leaders
- Needs change
- Time to support
- Leading together

These findings, connected to the research questions and theoretical framework, are explored further in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 5

ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS FROM THE ACTION RESEARCH CASE

The initial purpose of this study was to determine the challenges presented to suburban elementary school teachers in the post-pandemic era and the impact of those challenges on their definition of support provided by elementary school leaders. The study also strived to combat the effect of these new challenges by developing perspectives on differentiated support structures for elementary teachers in a new era of teaching. The purpose of this study was supported by research around three major themes: challenges through the perspective of suburban elementary teachers in the post-pandemic teaching era, definitions of support in an elementary setting after the year 2020, and different types of administrative support structures and their influence on teacher job satisfaction and working conditions.

The research questions guiding this study took shape from the ponderings of the researcher in the spring of 2022. Why are teachers commenting on a lack of support as a reason to leave a position at Lucas Pointe Elementary School? What new challenges did the 2021-2022 school year pose that were not previously existent at Lucas Pointe Elementary School or the environment at large? How can support structures be altered to support the retention of teachers in the current day?

The following research questions were used to guide the investigation and draw conclusions from this action research study:

1. How do teachers in one suburban elementary school describe the comprehensive support needed in the post-pandemic era?

2. What is the impact of school leaders on suburban elementary teachers' self-efficacy and resilience?
3. How does the action research team describe the process of designing and implementing comprehensive support structures for teachers in one suburban elementary school?

To follow the narrative of each action research cycle described in Chapter 4, the researcher used Chapter 5 to detail the data analysis methods used to determine the findings. The chapter presents connections between the data collected and the findings, which answered the research questions.

Introduction of the Data Analysis Process

This study aimed to determine new challenges teachers face and assess the impact of supportive measures applied by school leaders. The researcher collected data for four months, from June 2024 through November 2024. The Action Research Implementation Team (ARIT) completed three action research cycles, following interventions developed by the Action Research Design Team (ARDT), which utilized the Plan, Act, Observe, Reflect logic model.

The researcher collected quantitative data before and after the action research cycles, using adapted versions of the Teacher Sense of Self-Efficacy Scale (T-SES) and Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC). The researcher used Microsoft Excel to analyze the data. Additionally, the researcher calculated and compared the statistical means for each survey item for changes across the study duration. The pre-and post-scores for Resilience and Self-Efficacy for each team can be found in Appendix I.

The researcher had considerable qualitative data to analyze, gathered from individual interviews, focus group sessions, team meeting observations, the researcher's journal, and the

Leader Reflection Log. The qualitative design emphasized studying people in their environments and interpreting their experiences (Bloomberg, 2023; Glanz, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). As a key feature of qualitative research, the researcher acted as the primary data collector and did not predetermine hypotheses before the research began. The outcome yielded highly descriptive findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). During the coding process, the researcher was particularly interested in how team members interpreted and attributed meaning to their experiences (Glanz, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

This study strictly adhered to a content analysis process without predetermined categories or themes established based on theory or hypothesis (Glanz, 2014). Transcriptions completed using an online program, Otter.ai, supported the researcher's goal of using "words as data" (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 3). The researcher compared each transcript with its original recording for accuracy and then downloaded the transcripts to Microsoft Word, formatted them with a three-inch right margin, and printed them for analysis. The researcher reread transcripts from individual interviews, focus groups, the Leader Reflection Log, and short answer surveys three times. Each involved an additional step, leading the researcher to develop themes, assign codes to text, and finally group these codes into findings.

As Bogdan and Biklen (2011) suggested, a researcher cannot pursue every possible direction, so the researcher narrowed the study during each review. The researcher recorded thoughts, questions, and reflections in the margins during the first reading. In the second reading, the researcher analyzed the notes to identify keywords and apply abbreviated codes to each section of text. For example, INT represented intentionality, V represented the voice of teachers, and NC represented needs change.

The researcher then recorded these codes with descriptions in the researcher's journal, initially identifying thirty-eight codes. After further reflection, some codes with consistent meaning were combined, while codes that appeared less than six times were removed from the analysis. Ultimately, twenty-two codes were retained. The final reading of the qualitative data allowed the researcher to analyze connections between the data and categorize each code for theme development. This process followed the data analysis spiral Creswell (2013) and culminated in the researcher linking the data interpretation to the research questions and theoretical framework. A table representing the developed themes and their corresponding codes is shown in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1

Codes and Themes Used in Analysis

Theme	Code	Occurrences
Teacher Support Needs	Teacher Voice	72
	Behavioral Gaps	61
	Instrumental	26
	Emotional	24
	Academic Gaps	18
	Time	16
	Informational	13
	Student Resilience	12
	Control	11
	Appraisal	9
Foundations for Support	Relationships	69
	Safe Space	24
	Proximity	6
Best Practice for Support	Using Intentionality	72
	Need Change	71
	Leading Together	21
	Know Your People	15
	Carryover	14
	Specific Praise	13
Discernment and Emotional Intelligence	Authentic Needs	26
	Timing and Framing	22
	Personality Differences	16

After a thorough reflection on the analyzed data, key findings emerged that were linked to the research questions. Table 5.2 reports those findings.

Table 5.2

Summary of Research Findings

Research Question	Key Findings
Q1: How do teachers in one suburban elementary school describe the comprehensive support needed in the post-pandemic era?	• Elementary teachers preferred specific types of social support, with instrumental and emotional support being the most frequently requested, while school leaders recognized a need for all four types of support. • Elementary teachers required innovative support in addressing the decline in student stamina, which affects resilience and exacerbates academic and behavioral gaps.
Q2: What is the impact of school leaders on suburban elementary teachers' self-efficacy and resilience?	• School leaders who consistently seek and use teacher feedback positively impact elementary teachers' self-efficacy and resilience. • October is an overwhelming period for elementary teachers, marked by a decline in self-efficacy and resilience.
Q3: How does the action research team describe the process of designing and implementing comprehensive support structures for teachers in one suburban elementary school?	• Social supports are most effective when delivered in environments with positive relationships and safe spaces for teachers to share their voices. • Leaders should use discernment to identify authentic needs and emotional intelligence to tailor support based on individual personalities.

The research findings are closely aligned with the purpose of this study, which aimed to investigate the provision of differentiated school leaders support to elementary school teachers. The next section presents an analysis of these findings in relation to each research question.

Research Question 1

Research Question 1: How do teachers in one suburban elementary school describe the comprehensive support needed in the post-pandemic era?

Key Finding: Elementary teachers express a preference for specific types of social support, with instrumental and emotional support being the most frequently requested, while school leaders recognize a need for all four types of support.

Key Finding: Elementary teachers require innovative support in addressing the decline in student stamina, which affects resilience and exacerbates academic and behavioral gaps.

Through individual interviews, observations, and surveys results, three themes emerged:

1. The type of social support sought by educators varies throughout the year, influenced by their specific context and the prevailing circumstances.
2. As the demands on planning time intensify, teacher leaders face significant challenges in balancing their own instructional duties with the time required to address the support needs of their peers.
3. Homeroom teachers face widening academic and behavioral gaps among their students and struggle to meet the growing diversity of needs on their own as student engagement decreases.

Needs Change

When teacher leaders were asked to describe the support needed by their teammates, most identified how these needs evolved over the school year. As they developed a greater

understanding of supportive measures aligned with different types of social support, teacher leaders became more attuned to situations where additional or various types of support were necessary. The ARIT members shared examples of how they had to remain agile to prioritize and adapt to the shifting needs of their teams. Imala Mato, for instance, believed she clearly understood the best practices for supporting her team—until new instructional initiatives required more than just addressing emotional needs.

> *My team's results were very high emotional, and that did not surprise me at all: comfort foods and cozy sweats. I started noticing with the year that it was, they started craving more instrumental. And having new teachers, making sure there's time for that informational support, even if that person identifies a need to be cared for.*

As the action research cycles progressed, grade-level leaders noticed trends in the requested support types and timing throughout the year. Gracen Thomas specifically described the heightened need for instrumental support from less experienced teachers during the critical month of October.

> *October requires more instrumental support, especially the newer teachers. Walking through fall conferences, report cards, doing things for the first time. I just feel like it (support) kind of ebbs and flows and when personal things come up, that's a different type of support. It's not that one person values one way of being supported. I don't think that's the only way they need all the time.*

Ruby Blackwell provided insight regarding informational needs presented toward the end of the case study in November.

> *Now, since we are moving more toward the middle of the year, I think a lot of the thought process is more Milestones (state assessment) is coming up. It's gearing more toward an*

> *informational need. Instead of just surviving, every meeting is like "what's our focus? Let's look at the end game, just give me the facts, so I know how to get there, what do I need to do?" I think they need that to make decisions. They feel more confident in looking at the bigger picture.*

Fane Austin also predicted the needs at the start of the calendar year.

> *If we asked again in January, support could be all about behaviors. Most of the things that are said (needs) are based on the time of year.*

Fallon Waite also shared her experience of monitoring timely needs and reflecting on approaching support through the agile leadership lens. She concluded that comprehensive support requires all four types of social support to address the complex needs of elementary teachers effectively.

> *At the beginning of the year, they didn't know what they needed, because they didn't know what the year was going to look like. I still do think the appraisal piece is big for our fifth-grade team, but now they're at the point where they need more instrumental support. I found myself making sure that I'm addressing all four types of support in some way, because even though my team says their main need is hearing their voice, at the end of the day, you still need information and you still need tools. I think it just made me more aware of making sure that all four categories are being addressed in some way. You can't just go all in on one.*

Time to Support

While teachers serving as school leaders in the study gained confidence in their ability to identify the changing needs of their teammates, many described a significant challenge presented with finding the time to provide adequate support to individuals. Gracen Thomas emphasized the

difficulty of balancing personal tasks with the need to support others, often leading to unintentional delays in follow-through.

> *The problem in every position is there is not enough time to do it (support). You feel like you're doing your own job and checklist of things to do, but then you've got to reach out. I would have good intention of doing it, and then get busy with my own things and realize a week and a half later, oh, I never did that at all, or I did not even speak to that person when I was planning to.*

Fallon Waite also expressed the difficulty in allocating sufficient time to serve as a teacher leader, noting that support is most effective when time is intentionally built into the schedule.

> *My biggest struggle is the time. How do you find time to provide support when a huge way that people feel supported is by giving them time. Connection and support takes time to be effective. With the dynamic of how our meetings are used this year, I don't feel like I've found a great way to provide the support without the time built in. I think the work that we've done here is so valuable that it should be implemented, but how can you do that without the time structured in?*

Brooke Light reflected on how time constraints make it challenging to coordinate support, especially when leaders and team members have conflicting schedules.

> *Time is always a barrier, because when they're free, I'm not always free, or I've got something else going on. It's always an issue. Leading is a full-time job. When you have a caseload of students and leadership, it's daunting. You really need three or four leaders on a team.*

These concerns were discussed with the ARDT. Several members who had previously served as administrators in ACSD acknowledged that structural changes to the elementary school schedule may be necessary to overcome this barrier to practical support.

Declining Student Resilience

At LPES, teachers ranked self-efficacy factors related to student engagement and management as lowest in pre- and post-cycle rating scales. The lowest-ranked specific indicators were related to controlling disruptive student behaviors, motivating students with low interest in schoolwork, and helping students value learning. During individual interviews, it was evident that teachers were facing new challenges in the classroom. The dynamics of instruction shifted, and a sense of urgency to reimagine teaching strategies to support a decline in student resilience would require more support. Imala Mato, 4th Grade Level Teacher Leader, reflected on how the pandemic disrupted social learning and weakened academic perseverance.

> *Student resilience is different and that's a big challenge. We gave a lot of grace to children knowing that they were missing some valuable face-to-face time for social learning during COVID and now that those expectations are starting to build back on there's some resistance to that. You just can't seem to make headway at times. It's interesting listening to some of the similar themes coming from teachers today. Behavior comes out. We are hitting a stamina wall with our students, and that resilience piece isn't there, we are watching it happen, the stamina is low and the ability to push past a challenge is low, behaviors are creeping out during those times. How do we support teaching resilience? How do we start building stamina? How do we hold them to expectations that are going to scaffold that building of stamina in a way that makes them feel good and positive and want to work harder? And how do we pull parents in and*

> *make them see that when your child struggled, it's not a bad thing? Actually it makes them stronger. I can't get anything done academically because of behaviors. There has to be a source analysis of that.*

Fane Austin echoed this concern, noting that while the grace period after COVID-19 was necessary, it was detrimental to students' current abilities to engage in the classroom.

> *I think it's become a little bit harder for children in elementary school to catch back up. We had COVID and then that next year was kind of like a grace period. I think it hurt a lot of kiddos educationally and socially. Now we are back on the train and there's those kids that can't go full speed. It's important for kids to build that resilience back and say we have to do it we have to keep pushing through.*

While the period during the COVID-19 pandemic was challenging for students and educators, Leslie Rally broadened the discussion to include the generational influence of technology.

> *I feel like their students now are very used to getting instantaneous type things. Student's ability to remain on task, I don't think is as good as it used to be. I also think that you have students whose behaviors aren't as necessarily respectful to people as a general rule, not just teachers, but like even their interactions with each other. The collaborative nature of students is not what it used to be and also their perseverance. You know, their ability to be challenged with something. I think that they've gotten to where they want to be able to just know it. And we live in a world where you can Google things and I'm sure kids see their parents if they don't know the answer to something, Google something. So I feel like their ability to problem solve and logically and rationally look at something, I think that's kind of gone down. I think that's one of the struggles with like, keeping them engaged and keeping them on task because you've got to come up with an almost like a*

Tik Tok way, you know, it's like trying to set up your classroom in a way now, where they're getting stuff quickly.

Providing emotional support to new teachers experiencing challenging student behaviors was a recurring topic of conversation in the ARIT focus group meetings.

The three topics described in response to Research Question 1 highlight the need for flexible and innovative support models to empower teachers in navigating increasingly complex challenges. It is evident that the needs of elementary teachers change over the year, and while teacher leaders are deeply committed to supporting their peers, the demands on their time limit the extent of their impact.

Research Question 2

Research Question 2: What is the impact of school leaders on suburban elementary teachers' self-efficacy and resilience?

Key Finding: School leaders who consistently seek and use teacher feedback positively impact elementary teachers' self-efficacy and resilience.

Key Finding: October is a period of disillusionment for elementary teachers, marked by a decline in self-efficacy and resilience.

Through rating scale scores, reflections, and observations, two themes emerged:

1. When feedback is provided and validated by a supportive school leader, teachers report increased confidence and a stronger belief in their ability to overcome challenges.
2. Overall, elementary teacher resilience is influenced by a fear of failure.

Teacher Voice

Throughout the study, the researcher analyzed and coded the transcripts, with the topic of teacher voice emerging 72 times. The descriptions of teacher voices varied widely, but the most common elements included understanding (18 instances), being heard (15 instances), input and feedback (12 instances), advice (12 instances), freedom (9 instances), and listening (6 instances). The ARIT found that support for teachers was amplified when they had opportunities to share their voices with school leaders. Ruby Blackwell, a 3rd-grade team leader, capitalized on this insight by creating a structured space for her team members to share reflections, ask questions, and provide input routinely. She shared that the outlet allowed her teammates to find relief in challenging circumstances by knowing someone was listening.

> *I think it's made my team feel more vocal… in the Google Form we put at the top 'if this is a vent session, it's okay', kind of like creating that safe space. I've gotten a lot of things that I would have never thought of on my own, so it's been really good to get feedback or thought processes of someone else and be able to check in. Is this really a problem, or is it kind of a bad day? Usually they say 'I think I was just really mad because, you know, my one kid did this'… I think once they talked through it the anxiety was gone. They just had to vent. They just had a moment, and I feel like we've had a lot more honesty in it.*

Fane Austin, another 3rd grade team leader, observed the positive impact of using a digital format for teachers to share their voices. She noticed that a teacher new to the school, Ms. Grizzle, felt more confident asking questions through the Google form, something she might not have done in person.

> *Ms. Grizzle (new teacher) made a comment in the Google form about talking about our tier two, tier three kids. She kind of mentioned that to Carmen, but we haven't heard*

back. She felt ok to say something there and thought, Fane and Ruby will bring it up to her somehow. When it's on the computer, you feel like there's not a curtain.

The 3rd-grade team at LPES was the only group to rate factors of self-efficacy and resilience higher in October than at the start of the research period in July. They had the highest overall self-efficacy and resilience of any team in the study, suggesting a positive correlation between voicing concerns and increased confidence.

Fallon Waite also observed additional outcomes from providing teachers with space to voice concerns and listen without aiming to offer immediate solutions. Her team consistently emphasized the importance of feeling known and heard within the broad school context.

I went in and checked with a couple team members individually that you could just kind of tell this person is very overwhelmed right now, or this person is frustrated and needs to be heard. With this at the forefront of my mind, there were some times that I went and just did individual check ins with a teacher, let them say what they need to say, and not necessarily be the one that fixes it or provides like a quick fix or a suggestion, but just listening.

Despite the positive outcomes of giving teachers a platform to voice their concerns, the transcripts revealed that teachers sometimes felt their voices and perspectives may not always be adequately recognized or considered. Leslie Rally, the EdTech Coach, discussed the challenges of supporting teachers when their concerns fall outside the leader's control.

I think some perceptions of what support would be sometimes are removing things that we have no control over. And they try and focus on those things, like implementing new programs…we don't have control over that you work in a district in which you're being asked to teach this ELA program.

This statement suggests that teachers may feel their needs and voices are overshadowed by external expectations or perceptions. Overall, while the ARIT recognized the need for teachers to have a voice, they also acknowledged challenges related to control and external pressures that may limit how effectively that voice is expressed or heard.

Fear of Failure

Overall ratings of teacher resilience during the study showed the most significant decline due to failure causing discouragement. This factor consistently ranked lowest among 4th-grade teachers at LPES and experienced the most substantial decline over the study period among 5th-grade and special education teachers. Fear of failure emerged as the most critical factor reducing team resilience. Individual interviews and ARIT focus group discussions revealed several sources of fear for teachers, including concerns about student behaviors (61 instances), students not meeting academic expectations (18 instances), parent reactions (14 instances), and unfamiliar curriculum resources (5 instances). While the school year began with optimism, by October, many teachers were discouraged by the lack of immediate impact from new implementations. The researcher observed that, while teachers noted concerns about students demonstrating low stamina in response to the lack of immediate results, the teachers appeared to exhibit a similar lack of resilience.

In the pre-cycle teacher support survey, Leslie Rally described the supportive environment that could alleviate her fear of failure.

> *I think that would be the biggest thing. I would need that freedom and that willingness to try something new without the fear of someone coming down on me saying, "Oh, no, that was awful. That didn't work. You know, why did you try that?"*

Fallon Waite also noted how the fear of failure her team showed hindered her ability to provide instrumental support.

> *I think that's kind of the hardest...I can't always have my hand in everything, and I don't ever want to go back behind somebody and be like, 'That doesn't align.' I don't want to crush them, then they'll think, 'Well, Fallon doesn't think my work is any good.'*

To combat this fear, Ms. Waite and Ruby Blackwell worked diligently to create a foundation of trust within their large 3rd-grade team so that it did not impact collaboration by offering, *Sometimes, in a group of 10, you don't want to speak up and say the wrong thing, you don't, you're afraid of judgment.*

The reflections journaled by the researcher further revealed instances where teachers sought guidance due to fear of making a wrong decision or a decision that they felt might not be supported by an administrator or parent. This fear seemed to paralyze them, preventing action and leading to a sense of uncertainty. A consistent theme in the pre-cycle interviews highlighted a need for emotional and instrumental support to alleviate this fear of failure. This underscored the importance of creating a supportive environment that empowers teachers to take risks and make decisions without fear of failure.

Research Question 3

Research Question 3: How does the action research team describe the process of designing and implementing comprehensive support structures for teachers in one suburban elementary school?

Key Finding: Social supports are most effective in environments with positive relationships and safe spaces for teachers to share their voices.

Key Finding: Leaders should use discernment to identify authentic needs and emotional intelligence to tailor support based on individual personalities.

Through individual interviews, focus groups, and observations, five themes emerged:

1. A positive personal relationship between school leaders and teachers forms the foundation for effectively applying social support.
2. When teachers have opportunities to share authentic feedback and express needs without fear of repercussions, school leaders can prioritize social support based on accurate data.
3. At times, school leaders must assess whether the needs that teachers express align with best practices.
4. When offering informational support, school leaders should consider and differentiate the timing and framing of information according to individual teacher personalities and readiness.
5. Protecting time for collaboration with other teacher leaders enhances effectiveness and builds leadership efficacy.

In November 2024, the action research teams reflected on designing and implementing the interventions to provide differentiated social support to LPES teachers. The researcher combined notes in her journal with themes from the post-cycle individual interviews and focus groups to develop meaning from the work the teams conducted together. The researcher found significant themes of relationship building, intentional awareness, authentic needs, timing and framing, and leader collaboration. Through data triangulation, the researcher revealed a dynamic cycle that illustrated the comprehensive support process within the study.

Planning for Support through Awareness and Intentionality

Evidence from post-cycle interview transcripts and the researcher's journal pointed to awareness as the foundational first step in the cycle. This required school leaders to actively

participate as learners of knowledge and people. Once leaders developed a framework for defining the four social supports through the focus group sessions, they could use intentionality when identifying and prioritizing opportunities for application. Learning about individual needs and strengths requires ARIT members to actively foster positive personal relationships, essential for effectively applying differentiated social supports.

The researcher coded the topic of relationships 69 times throughout the transcripts and notes in the study and mentioned it more often than any other code in the pre-cycle teacher definitions of support. Leslie Rally described her experience leveraging her relationships to support the school goals.

> *The relationships that I have with the teachers, I think we're friends, but I do think that they respect me as a professional as an educator, and I think that they are open to support from me. I think lots of times I'm able to deliver information that may be not as well received from one person, as if I were to say it.*

Imala Mato also saw her foundation of strong relationships as a springboard to practical support.

> *I do think my leadership style is very relational. The fact that I'm leading a group that I've had a chance to form relationships with makes a big difference. I feel like I've earned trust from them to be thought of as someone who maybe has or is willing to seek answers for a group of people. I also am familiar with the strengths of a majority of the teammates, which supports our work.*

The LPES 3rd-grade team began the year with five teachers who were new to the team. Fane Austin described how learning more about her teammate's strengths supported her work as a leader of such a large team. Knowing their strengths formed supportive relationships toward common goals.

Now I have a really good relationship with my teammates, and I think that's because we all share the same goals. We all kind of use each other as resources. I'm thinking of one teammate that had a very challenging class. She had a lot of ESL kids this year, and she had not really experienced that in her teaching. She came to me as an inclusion teacher and asked, 'What do I do with some of these kiddos that maybe are not supported in sped yet? How do I teach them because they are so low?' I've formed a great relationship with her. She also had strengths that I used as well. Like she was great with technology, and she would help me. Whether they're a seasoned teacher, whether they're a first-year teacher I think it's important know those strengths and have good relationships, so that then you can kind of lean on each other when you need help.

Building relationships allowed teachers to feel safe sharing their voices and allowed leaders to "listen" through an individual lens by which they learned how to support each teacher. The school leaders could gain authentic teacher feedback, ensuring that the leaders heard their expressed needs without fear of repercussions. Differentiated supports were then able to be based on accurate, data-driven insights. Fallon Waite described the lens of awareness that she consistently used when differentiating supports for her team members.

Within our team, there are very different personalities. There's some teachers that are, 'you're never going to hurt my feelings. I don't have feelings to hurt. Shoot me straight'. I've heard that literal comment. And then you have others who you can look at them halfway wrong, and they cry and think that you don't like them anymore. I think it's just a balance. Knowing this is how my team needs support, but then recognizing individual personalities, because the way you respond or provide even emotional support to one team member may cause another team member to respond differently…so learning their

> *personality and preferences and communication style is important. The whole thing has been super insightful because it has allowed me to see certain team members in different ways. Sometimes, behavior can be seen as defensive or combative, but then taking the survey results and really diving in has allowed me to lower a wall for some of my team members and get a peek into what really fills their bucket or what really does the opposite.*

Every ARIT member described the most prominent change within their leadership as developing intentionality around awareness of requested support types and creating structures for providing those supports. Fallon also described the shift she made as a leader during the study.

> *Everything that we've done through the intervention cycles, especially the time that we dove into the four different types of social support, that was very eye-opening, have brought an awareness of support, and then with that awareness allows me to be more intentional and purposeful with the way that I lead my team. To see that there are many different ways and many different avenues of supporting and kind of exploring what those are allowed me to be more intentional.*

Leaders described how using intentionality prevented individual team members from feeling disconnected or being looked over, especially among larger teams. Brooke Light committed to tracking her provision of specific praise after noting overwhelm among her team members. The 4th and 5th-grade leaders emphasized the impact of departmentalization on their intentionality. Imala Mato identified one person on her team that she could never connect with due to teaching different content, being on opposite ends of the hall, not being partnered, and not having an assigned mentor.

> *Being departmentalized, it gets a little tricky, because there are certain people you end up not interacting with at all, so I love that intentionality to check on. I have to sort of put myself out there, and I think that's helped pull in people that might otherwise feel disconnected from the rest of the group.*

Many leaders shared specific logistical structures they had developed to increase their intentional support application. Gracen Thomas used a scheduling feature on her calendar to increase the deliberate application of individual support.

> *Certain people on my team, I feel like I already knew well enough, like what things they appreciate or what things they need. But then if I thought back to it, did I give them those things, or did I make the effort to really do that on a consistent basis? Probably not always. So I used Outlook invites, because that is my life. My calendar. If I set it in there…this day go down the hall and check in with this person, or write a note to this person, that helped me keep on track.*

Differentiating Support through Informed Decision Making

The next step in providing comprehensive support to teachers at Lucas Pointe Elementary was to reflect on the knowledge gained in the first part of the cycle to make informed support decisions. The ARIT members aligned support with individual teacher needs, considering whether those needs reflected best practices and adapting approaches accordingly. ARIT members also assessed the readiness of their teachers, differentiating the timing and framing of information based on individual personalities and situational contexts. Imala Mato found times when her close relationships with teammates challenged her leadership. She learned the nuances between providing comfort and providing support that impacts practice.

What we think we need and what we actually need might be different. So, the leader recognizes a need and has to then try to transfer that need to someone who doesn't recognize a need in their own practice, and you have a close personal relationship to that person. I think it makes it a little more challenging. I wouldn't change it. You just have to kind of work around it in a different way.

Similarly, Fane Austin described a time when she, as a leader, realized that her team had skipped essential instruction and saw evidence of low test scores. She wanted to validate the work her teammates did in planning but also maintain the fidelity of high-quality instruction as the goal of her team.

I see those people straying and not making them mad. It is almost like a dance where I have to try not to step on people's toes by telling them that they do anything wrong, because they're not intentionally wanting to do something wrong, but bringing them back to make sure we are teaching the right things.

The researcher gained a sense that each school leader was developing an ability to frame communication and the time needed to share information based on the authentic needs and individual personalities of their teammates. Fallon Waite shared how her ability to read the room has supported timely decision-making in a moment that could have led to overwhelm. Brooke Light described her process of scanning and assessing facial expressions during Friday morning team meetings to prioritize follow-up conversations throughout the day. Gracen Thomas reflected on how the action research study developed her awareness of different perspectives when making decisions for her team.

I need all the information that makes me feel good and organized, but some people don't need all the information right away all the time. Sometimes that overwhelms them, and

> *then they stress, and they worry. I'm learning when to share or step in and when to kind of just let them do on their own.*

Each strategy represents the skillset and agility in making leader decisions to support individual needs.

Leading Together

The researcher noted evidence of strong bonds formed between the members of the ARIT. Data supported the impact of the focus group sessions on these bonds and the collective leader efficacy of the ARIT. The team appreciated the cohort model for discussing the interventions, and most group members requested a continuation of the sessions for the remainder of the year. Fallon Waite described the impact of the focus group on her confidence as a leader.

> *The community of leaders together, being able to brainstorm and talk through the challenges, talk through the successes. It was nice to hear how other teams are doing things and how other teams are checking in on their team and tailoring support to different things. We're in it together. We're learning together. We're leading together.*

Fane Austin expressed similar views regarding the shared experience.

> *I always like to feel like I'm not alone, so just hearing what they all (other leaders) are saying, and it's the same as us…it's the lack of time, trying to be intentional, certain people don't want certain things, based on the beginning you thought your team was one way, but they were actually the other. So it's just kind of nice to know we're not alone.*

Gracen Thomas noticed that her thinking was clarified when analyzing data with the group of leaders.

I wouldn't have come to that conclusion on my own, looking at the data. I think that was just helpful to have other people to bounce it off.

In addition to the support provided to team leaders by the focus group, ARIT members noted the positive impact of sharing leadership responsibilities on their teams. Brooke Light led the largest team at LPES, comprised of over 25 individual teachers.

You probably need three or four leaders on our team. I love that we've done department chairs in the speech department and in self-contained, that has really helped. Adding an IRR co-chair, gosh, that's helped tremendously.

Teacher leader Gracen Thomas also conveyed appreciation for sharing the weight of supporting a larger team with another leader on the ARIT. She reflected on dividing and conquering supportive measures for her 4th-grade team.

I think it was helpful to have another view on the same information. I think that's why it's helped to have Imala, having two people that were really focused on this, because we could tag team. Imala and I would come back after a meeting and say, I think this person needs this kind of help, are you going to reach out and sit down and work with them on this strategy? Did you notice this person's really upset this week because they've got this going on? Do you think they would appreciate if we said something or did something nice or brought in a present or whatever the case?

Protecting time to collaborate with other teacher leaders was crucial to build collective leadership efficacy and enhance overall effectiveness. Leaders in this study found that the lack of time to support teachers was counteracted when they could benefit from a group thinking structure for prioritizing support. This cycle of learning, listening, deciding, and collaborating allowed school leaders to offer comprehensive, tailored support that teachers needed.

Chapter Summary

This chapter highlighted the key themes from this action research study and their connections to the research questions the action research team investigated. It also explained the coding and theming methods. Six main findings, drawn from the data collected in response to the research questions, were presented and enhanced by direct quotations from ARIT members.

Chapter Six will summarize the study, link the literature reviewed to the findings, address the limitations, and offer implications and recommendations for practitioners, researchers, and policymakers.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND CONNECTIONS TO LEADERSHIP PRACTICES

The initial purpose of this study was to determine the challenges presented to suburban elementary school teachers in the post-pandemic era and the impact of those challenges on their definition of support provided by elementary school leaders. The study also strived to combat the effect of these new challenges by developing perspectives on differentiated support structures for elementary teachers in a new era of teaching. The purpose of this study was supported by research around three major themes: challenges through the perspective of suburban elementary teachers in the post-pandemic teaching era, definitions of support in an elementary setting after the year 2020, and different types of administrative support structures and their influence on teacher job satisfaction and working conditions.

The research questions guiding this study took shape from the ponderings of the researcher in the spring of 2022. Why are teachers commenting on a lack of support as a reason to leave a position at Lucas Pointe Elementary School? What new challenges did the 21-22 school year pose that were not previously existent at Lucas Pointe Elementary School or the environment at large? How can support structures be altered to support the retention of teachers in the current day?

The following research questions were used to guide the investigation and draw conclusions from this action research study:

1. How do teachers in one suburban elementary school describe the comprehensive support needed in the post-pandemic era?
2. What is the impact of school leaders on suburban elementary teachers' self-efficacy and resilience?
3. How does the action research team describe the process of designing and implementing comprehensive support structures for teachers in one suburban elementary school?

Chapter 6 summarizes the key findings and themes of each research question and outlines the connections to the literature reviewed throughout this study. The chapter also addresses the limitations and offers recommendations for practitioners, policymakers, and researchers. The chapter concludes with the researcher's final thoughts.

Summary and Discussion of the Findings

This action research study was structured around three primary research questions. These questions enabled the researcher to investigate how elementary school teachers define support in the post-pandemic era, the impact of school leader support on teacher resilience and self-efficacy, and the experiences of an action research team in designing and implementing a comprehensive support structure for teachers. The researcher identified several themes that linked the six findings to the scholarly literature reviewed. The researcher supported these themes with data extrapolated from individual interviews, focus groups, surveys, rating scales, and the researcher's journal notes.

Themes from Research Question 1

During the Spring of 2022, the researcher was interested in clarifying the 'lack of support' noted by teachers leaving Lucas Pointe Elementary School (LPES, a pseudonym).

Compared to standard support structures within a concrete framework, such as formalized induction programs and mentor/mentee assignments, teachers perceived support from school leaders more complexly (Erturk, 2021; Santoro, 2019). The first research question focuses on the perspectives of elementary teachers in defining the support they need. With increased policy and societal pressures following the pandemic, more teachers could not align the morals behind their teaching practices with school demands. (GaDOE, 2022; Mineo, 2022; Santoro, 2018). School leaders must understand these feelings and the practices that can be implemented to support teacher resilience and self-efficacy when demoralizing. Based on the data collected and analyzed, the first key finding emerged: Elementary teachers prefer specific types of social support, with instrumental and emotional support being the most frequently requested. At the same time, school leaders recognize a need for all four types of support.

Aguilar (2018) discussed how emotional and professional needs evolve throughout the school year, emphasizing that these needs are dynamic and tied to the circumstances of the academic calendar. This recognition confirmed a significant theme identified by the researcher: the type of social support sought by educators varied throughout the year, influenced by their specific context and prevailing circumstances. Resilience was not a fixed trait but rather something that could fluctuate. Therefore, when supporting resilience, a school leader needs to understand that teacher needs may change over time based on internal and external factors (Aguilar, 2018; Erturk, 2021; House, 1981). As evidenced in the researcher's notes and individual interview transcripts, school leaders must regularly monitor the needs of teachers to provide aligned support for the circumstance. Assuming that a teacher with expressed informational needs in September would continue to require the same type of support in October

could lead to frustration if their evolving instrumental or emotional needs are not addressed simultaneously.

A second theme that emerged revealed that, like the teachers they support, school leaders faced significant challenges in balancing their instructional duties with the time needed to address the varying support needs of their peers throughout the year. School leaders had gained confidence in identifying the types of support most aligned with expressed needs but found that, during certain times of the year, the demands of their roles caused them to overlook or defer the needs of their peers. A sense of overwhelm and guilt often overcame many leaders when their time for providing support was consumed by mounting tasks (Santoro, 2019). Many teachers have expressed similar feelings since the pandemic, including frustration with increased accountability demands, reduced planning time, and a lack of autonomy. These factors were all noted as contributors to teacher burnout (Christian-Brandt et al., 2020; GaDOE, 2022).

The second key finding correlated with how elementary teachers defined support, revealing that they required innovative approaches to address the decline in student stamina, which affects resilience and exacerbates academic and behavioral gaps. Teacher self-efficacy surveys evidenced low confidence in motivating and engaging students. Individual interviews and focus group transcripts noted a pervasive change in the range of student abilities presented in classrooms. Coupled with mandated curriculum implementations that lack differentiated instruction and assessment, teachers expressed frustration with rising student behaviors and low stamina for independent academic perseverance. Santoro (2018) also agreed that district-wide curriculum mandates do not match student academic needs. Darling-Hammond and Hyler (2020) noted that educators must know how to use formative assessments to begin to address the widening academic gaps. School leaders spent increasing amounts of time supporting the

emotional needs of teachers overwhelmed by negative behaviors students shared during instruction.

The GaDOE teacher burnout study (2022) validated the stress presented when academic recovery is essential and planning time is filled with meetings, describing the workload as impossible and exhausting. Many expressed a lack of strategies and tools to equip new teachers to manage behaviors and engage learners. Many school leaders used a transformational leadership approach to influence, motivate, and stimulate the success of their peers using individualized considerations (Burns, 1978). Considering these findings, it is crucial to consider how evolving support needs converge with the pressures school leaders face.

Themes from Research Question 2

The second research question focused on the impact school leader support had on resilience and self-efficacy. After the pandemic, many teachers felt that their voices were excluded from the overarching decisions made by school leaders. Whether regarding school board policies, COVID-19 protocols, assessment of students, curriculum resources, or schedules, teachers felt a lack of confidence in their autonomy to make decisions that best meet the needs of their students (Walker, 2021). Building teacher resilience became increasingly important as intense political forces undermined school leaders, positively impacting teachers (Babb et al., 2022). With more teachers than ever leaving the profession, a sense of urgency propelled the researcher and the members of the action research team to identify efforts that could improve teacher retention.

Drawing on the theory of transformational leadership (Burns, 1978), which emphasized the importance of individual consideration in fostering self-efficacy and commitment to a shared vision, the researcher identified the first key finding: School leaders who consistently seek and

use feedback from teachers have a positive impact on elementary school teachers' self-efficacy and resilience.

Results from the teacher self-efficacy and resilience scales reported that the most significant gains came from the 3rd-grade team. During individual interviews with school leaders, the researcher noted a consistent structure in identifying and supporting the needs of teachers on the third-grade team, in contrast to the other teams participating in the study. The routine approach reinforced the theme that when feedback is actively sought and validated by a supportive school leader, teachers report increased confidence and a stronger belief in their ability to overcome challenges. Literature supported this, highlighting the importance of administrators opening conversations to better understand teacher experiences and perspectives (Blanchet, 2022; Ronfeldt, 2017; Santoro, 2021).

The other key finding related to the second research question identified October as a particularly overwhelming period for elementary teachers, marked by a decline in self-efficacy and resilience. Aguilar (2018) discussed this period in depth, describing it as disillusionment for teachers. Data from interviews and teacher resilience scales identified a theme that a fear of failure negatively influenced elementary teachers' resilience. Pressures to meet testing deadlines, implement curriculum to fidelity, and complete tasks added by administration lead to fear, contribute to stress, and cause a decline in emotional well-being (Babb et al., 2022; Gonzalez, 2016). The October grading and reporting period, coupled with many students not meeting state standards, heightened fears of parent reactions and a sense of failure, mainly when immediate results from new curriculum resources were not visible. In the second assessment of teacher resilience, fear of failure was rated as the most significant factor impacting teachers overall.

Post-pandemic, teachers experience increasing stress due to the rapidly evolving education landscape. To mitigate this, they needed emotional, informational, instrumental, and appraisal support from school leaders. This support helped teachers gain confidence, reduce anxiety, and counter the feelings of isolation and hopelessness contributing to their desire to leave the profession (Cullen, 1994; House, 1981). Chan et al. (2021) also implied that school leaders should reduce the workload for teachers and clarify their roles to increase self-efficacy and teacher retention. These findings underscore the critical role of school leaders in seeking teacher voices and responding to feedback, highlighting the need for ongoing, responsive leadership strategies to navigate the challenges teachers face, particularly in high-stress periods.

Themes from Research Question 3

The third research question focused on the action research teams describing their process for designing and implementing comprehensive support for teachers. The researcher distinguished a chronological process described by the ARIT through data triangulation. The process began with developing an awareness of the four types of social support and carefully considering the individual needs of their colleagues (Burns, 1978; House, 1981). The first key finding highlighted that social support is most effective in environments characterized by positive relationships and safe spaces for teachers to share their voices.

The data collected in this study uncovered two themes supported by the literature reviewed. A positive personal relationship between school leaders and teachers forms the foundation for effectively applying social support (Blanchet, 2022; Reitman, 2019; Santoro, 2021). Teachers feel a lack of voice and autonomy in classroom decision-making (GaDOE, 2022). This less structured support approach allows teachers to share authentic feedback and express needs without fear of repercussions and allows school leaders to prioritize social support

based on accurate data (Erturk, 2021; Kiral, 2020). Findings by Chan et al. (2021) also emphasized that leadership practices that created a sense of belonging for teachers and provided increased autonomy had the most impact on teacher well-being.

The second key finding linked to research question three noted leaders using discernment to identify authentic teacher needs and emotional intelligence to tailor support based on individual personalities. Multiple implementation team members shared a familiar obstacle: determining whether expressed needed to align with best practices. Schwanke (2018) also raised the issue of the development of individualized support. It is essential to understand teacher experiences without mindlessly focusing on teacher desires, keeping in mind the primary goal of education: student success (Schwanke, 2018). While teachers, like anyone, desire comfort, school leaders must balance support so that it does not prioritize comfort over the broader educational mission. School leaders in this study noted several instances where they discerned a need for instrumental support that ultimately increased teacher confidence, even when teachers initially expressed emotional needs.

Burns (1978) indicated the necessity for individual considerations in his transformational leadership theory, which aligns with the research theme. When offering informational support, school leaders must consider and differentiate the timing and framing of information according to individual teacher personalities and readiness. Providing too much information at once can overwhelm teachers and hinder their ability to absorb key concepts.

Therefore, school leaders need to differentiate how much, how often, and in what manner information is delivered. Sometimes, this may require withholding information or using differentiated delivery models to ensure clarity. An inexperienced or overwhelmed leader may find providing this level of tailored support challenging. A common theme from the leaders in

this study was the importance of protecting time for collaboration with other teacher leaders, as this enhances effectiveness and builds leadership efficacy.

Limitations of the Current Study

A pre-understanding of the culture within an organization can serve and limit the knowledge, insights, and experiences of a researcher conducting qualitative research (Coghlan, 2019). When reflecting on how the dual role of the researcher and the internal participant could limit the reliability of the study, the researcher reviewed the list of questions developed by Merriam and Tisdell (2016) to challenge the trustworthiness of qualitative research.

While understanding the informal culture could have allowed the researcher to observe the participants without disrupting the environment, holding a position of influence over the co-participants could have compromised the transparency in responses during participant interviews (Maxwell, 2013). The researcher may have also been limited by making assumptions during interviews where outsiders may have probed deeper (Coghlan, 2019). Personal biases based on pre-existing work relationships may have limited the researcher's ability to view the data with the same lens as an outsider. Using a researcher's journal to reflect on the awareness of biases consistently helped alleviate the potential bias in making assumptions.

Furthermore, the participants were limited to a focus group of seven school leaders and teachers in one suburban elementary school. This specific context and time frame limited the generalization of the findings to the broader population. The results of this study were unique, and a different or more significant sample of participants may have yielded different findings.

Implications and Recommendations for Practitioners

The recommendations outlined in this section were developed based on what the researcher found to be true in this action research study. All recommendations are considered actionable and reasonable for application to a broader range of elementary school contexts.

One recommendation for school leaders is to allot intentional time to collect qualitative data that provides insight into the individual needs and challenges that teachers face each year. Taking this time to learn how each teacher defines support and what actions feel supportive in the workplace may lead to an increased capacity of leaders to support teachers individually. As supportive measures are defined, school leaders may be able to align their actions more clearly to the needs of each teacher. School leaders should determine how they can measure the impact of support provided so that reflection and improvement may occur.

In this study, school leaders were not limited to administrators. It is recommended that schools develop teacher leadership around providing social support in the workplace to support the teaching staff as a whole. This type of innovative support structure expands the influence of school administrators when time and human resources are limited. When individual needs and definitions of support are precise, school leaders can maximize their efforts in more effective ways.

Research on teacher empowerment most strongly addresses the need for authentic relationships and open communication with school leaders, as expressed by teachers since the pandemic (Erturk, 2021; Kiral, 2020). School leaders should create safe spaces where teachers feel comfortable providing feedback and insight into the challenges and successes they face in their practice. Providing information was also noted in this elementary setting as a preferred supportive action. School leaders should use discernment when timing the communication of

expectations and information. Clarity, consistency, and timeliness can empower teachers to make informed decisions.

Implications and Recommendations for Researchers

According to Dewey (1929), “Scholarly work initiates as many questions as it answers.” (p. 277). Given the limitations of this study, it is recommended that future research explore the effects of differentiated social supports within public schools without potential evaluator influence and across various middle and high school settings. Extending the action research study period beyond October would allow researchers to enhance the reliability of the data collected and assess changes in resilience and self-efficacy for an entire school year. These recommendations could contribute to advancing education more extensively.

Additional questions revealed to the researcher from the findings and themes include:

- How does teacher resilience change over time (years of experience)?
- How is teacher resilience correlated with student resilience?
- What patterns or trends correlate perceived needs and definitions of support to different generations?
- What is the impact/influence of social media on the perceptions of teachers and teacher perceptions?
- How do growing policy restrictions in the elementary setting impact student engagement?

Future research could build on this investigation by collecting resilience and self-efficacy data at the individual teacher level rather than aggregating them by department. Linking pre- and post-intervention data with individual demographic information could uncover additional insights and reveal more distinct findings.

Implications and Recommendations for Policy Makers

The State Department of Education (2024) provides specific guidance for teacher induction programs, but state policy does not exist to mandate the funding. The findings of this study support the recommendation to policymakers that differentiated support for teachers through and beyond the induction years should be funded to address the rising challenges presented to teachers throughout their careers.

During the formal invitation process, two school leaders declined to participate. Lack of time and financial compensation influenced teacher leadership development intervention participation. The findings of this study indicate that policymakers should review research related to leader-to-teacher ratios that positively impact teacher resilience and consider increasing funding to support the provision of stipends for teacher leaders.

Additionally, revisiting traditional grading and reporting systems should be considered. The lack of consistent quality education during the COVID-19 pandemic increased the variation in student ability levels and resulted in many students having more significant academic gaps. Policymakers must use innovative approaches considering the challenges this presents to classroom teachers. Mastery-based education practices, instead of conventional age-based programs, could be a better intervention to support the diverse learning needs of today's students. Ryan et al. (2017) noted that adapting current educator preparation programs to match the needs of the post-pandemic school system tops the recommendations for policymakers.

Concluding Thoughts

The initial purpose of this study was to examine the challenges faced by suburban elementary school teachers in the post-pandemic era and their impact on their perceptions of support provided by school leaders. The study sought to better understand and address these

challenges by exploring perspectives on differentiated support structures for teachers in this new era of education. The researcher was driven by a commitment to fostering a safe and connected public school environment where all students can thrive.

In a time when myriad issues increasingly impact student academic abilities, the absence of resilient and self-efficacious teachers could lead to additional challenges in public education. Who will remain, and what legacy will they leave for the future of our nation? The children of America deserve our best. Public school leaders should intentionally support the next generation of teachers and the next generation of learners. Both have changed and have been impacted substantially by the ramifications of the pandemic. Both present challenges as well as accompanying opportunities for public education.

The findings of this study provide a starting point, taking us one step closer to supporting the unique needs of today's elementary teachers and stemming the flow of teachers leaving the profession. By intentionally applying differentiated social supports—built on personal relationships and transparent communication—all teachers can experience increased confidence and resilience, ensuring all students have access to a more equitable educational experience.

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APPENDIX A

Self-Efficacy and Resilience Scales

Section 1:Teacher Beliefs (Self-Efficacy)

These questions are designed to help us better understand the kinds of things that create difficulties for teachers. Please indicate your opinion about each of the statements below. Your answers are confidential.

How much can you do...

1. To control disruptive behavior in the classroom?
2. To motivate students who show low interest in school work?
3. To get students to believe they can do well in school?
4. To help your students value learning?
5. To craft good questions for your students?
6. To get children to follow classroom rules?
7. To calm a student who is disruptive?
8. To establish a classroom management system with each group of students?
9. To use a variety of assessment strategies?
10. To provide an alternative explanation or example when students are confused?
11. To assist families in helping their children do well in school?
12. To implement differentiation strategies in your classroom?

Section 2:

Please indicate how often the statement describes you. (Resilience)

How often do the following statements describe you?

- Never True
- Rarely True
- Sometimes True
- Often True
- True Nearly All of the Time

1. I am able to adapt when changes occur.
2. I have at least one close and secure relationship.
3. Sometimes fate or faith helps me.
4. I can deal with whatever comes my way.
5. Past successes give me confidence.
6. I try to see the humorous side of things when I am faced with problems.

7. Having to cope with stress can make me stronger.
8. I tend to bounce back after illness, injury, or other hardships.
9. I believe most things happen for a reason.
10. I make my best effort, no matter what.
11. I believe I can make my goals, even if there are obstacles.
12. Even when hopeless, I do not give up.
13. In times of stress, I know where to find help.
14. Under pressure, I stay focused and think clearly.
15. .I am not easily discouraged by failure.
16. I think of myself as a strong person when dealing with life's challenges and difficulties.
17. I feel like I am in control.
18. I am able to handle unpleasant or painful feelings like sadness, fear and anger.
19. I have a strong sense of purpose in life.

APPENDIX B

Pre-Planning Support Survey

Thank you for providing insight to school leaders on how we can best support your team this year. All information collected will be anonymous and used to prioritize supportive measures. In this survey, a "school leader" is defined as any staff member who supports and guides other staff members.

1. What department or team do you belong to?
2. Rank the supportive measures in order of how they positively impact your success as a teacher.
   - When school leaders provide me with tools, training, or help to accomplish goals and tasks.
   - When school leaders connect with me relationally to show care and concern for what's going on in my classroom and my life.
   - When school leaders provide consistent, clear information so that I can make informed decisions.
   - When school leaders provide feedback on what I am doing well and acknowledge my contributions.

3. How satisfied are you with the level of support you currently receive in your teaching role?

	Very satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	Somewhat dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied
From Job-Alike leaders					
From Coaches					
From Admin					
From Peer Mentors					

4. How do you personally define "support" in the context of your role as a teacher?
5. How do you define success in your role? Or- give an example of a time you knew you had succeeded as a teacher.

APPENDIX C

Pre-Cycle Implementation Team Interview

1. Share some examples of support you have received in the past from school leaders. What was most helpful to your success?

2. How do you personally define support in the context of your role as a teacher?

3. What new challenges have been presented to teachers over the last few years? (in general)

4. Describe your relationship with your teammates.

5. How do you perceive your team members' definition of support? What has led you to these perceptions?

6. How would you describe your preparedness to support the teachers on your team?

7. Share any experiences you have had providing support to team members.

8. What improvements or changes would you suggest to enhance support provided to teachers in your school?

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

APPENDIX D

Post-Cycle Interview Questions

1. How have you changed as a leader over the three intervention cycles?
2. What parts of the Focus Group sessions have been helpful to you as a leader?
3. How have the four components of social support theory influenced your leadership approach?
4. How did the interventions impact your team members?
5. What changes have you noticed from the start of the year until now?
6. What impacts have you observed from providing differentiated support to your team members?
7. How would you describe the support needed by the teachers on your team today?
8. Discuss how your communication, preparation, and/or approach differed depending on the support style you used.
9. Were there any barriers that you encountered? If so, what were they?
10. What else would you like to share at this time?

APPENDIX E

Action Research Implementation Team Focus Group Meeting Agendas

Meeting #1

- Data Overview- Why Teachers Leave
- Research Overview
    - Needs Have Changed
    - Social Supports
    - Know Your People
- Action Research Plan
- Discussion
    - What do you wonder? What needs to be clarified?
    - What do you need? What are your hopes?
    - What are the big rocks? Areas of support?
    - What are our action steps?
    - What are your predictions?
    - How should we structure communication in between meetings?

Meeting #2

- Data Analysis- Narrowing the Focus
    - Recording Sheet
    - Data Reflection Discussion
    - Chart group findings
- Lens to Lead- Review
- Group Sort
    - Diving deeper into Social Supports
- Next Steps:
    - 2 Commitments
    - Leader Reflection Template
- Questions and Needs

Meeting #3

- Lens to Lead- Reviewing Social Support
- Commitments Recap
- Learning Together (Data Focused)
    - Organizational Narratives can Build Resilience
    - Celebrate and Acknowledge to Build Confidence
- Next Steps:
    - Leaders Reflection Survey
    - Personal Reflection
- Questions and Needs

Meeting #4

- Leaders Reflection Survey- Last Submission today
- Group Discussion
    - Describe the weekly reflection process.
    - What impacts did this group have on your ability to support your team?
    - What do you still want to know or learn more about?
- Resilience and Self-Efficacy Data (Post)- Due Friday
- Sign up for a Post-Cycle Interview
- Questions and Needs

APPENDIX F

UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA
CONSENT FORM
DIFFERENTIATED SUPPORTS FOR ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TEACHERS TO INCREASE RESILIENCE AND SELF-EFFICACY

You are being asked to take part in a research study. The information in this form will help you decide if you want to be in the study. Please ask the researcher(s) below if there is anything that is not clear or if you need more information.

Principal Investigator: Dr. Jami Berry
Department of Lifelong Education, Administration, and Policy
jamiberry@uga.edu

Co-Investigator: Abby Gaines
Department of Lifelong Education, Administration, and Policy
aeh59607@uga.edu

The purpose of this study is to determine the challenges presented to suburban elementary school teachers in the post-pandemic era and the impact of those challenges on their definition of support provided by elementary school leaders. The study will also strive to combat the effect of these new challenges by developing perspectives on differentiated support structures for elementary teachers in a new era of teaching.

You are being invited to be in this research study because you have experience as a leader of a suburban elementary school. Your participation in this study will assist the investigators in understanding your experiences as a leader.

If you agree to participate in this study:

- We will collect information about your perception of providing support to suburban elementary school teachers.
- We will ask you to participate in a virtual Focus group. These will take about 60 minutes each time.
- The total research period will be three months and data will be collected throughout the duration of the research period.
- All information collected will be private; the use of pseudonyms and removal of identifying information will ensure anonymity.

Participation is voluntary. You can refuse to take part or stop at any time without penalty. Your decision to participate, not participate, or rescind your consent will have no impact on your evaluation or experiences as a teacher or leader in your organization.

Throughout this study, investigators will work to eliminate or reduce any potential risk or discomfort. If you encounter a survey or reflection question that you find uncomfortable, you can skip these questions without answering them.

Your responses may help us understand how differentiated supports can impact the resilience and self-efficacy of suburban elementary school teachers. The data collected throughout this study may help us make recommendations to other elementary school leaders to increase their confidence and capacity to support elementary school teachers in the post-pandemic era.

We will take steps to protect your privacy, but there is a small risk that your information could be accidentally disclosed to people not connected to the research. To reduce this risk we will ensure that all identifiable information will be removed in any draft of the final form of the report. Additionally, all data will be collected and stored in a private location that is password-protected. We will only keep information that could identify you in a private location that is password-protected and only accessible by the investigator. This information will be destroyed after 5 years. No identifiable information will be shared in this study or for future studies.

This research involves the transmission of data over the Internet. Every reasonable effort has been taken to ensure the effective use of available technology; however, confidentiality during online communication cannot be guaranteed.

Please provide initials if you agree to have your participation audio recorded or not. All audio recordings will be destroyed at the conclusion of the study. You may still participate in this study even if you are not willing to have your participation recorded.

_____I do not want to have my participation audio recorded.

_____I am willing to have my participation audio recorded.

Please feel free to ask questions about this research at any time. You can contact the Principal Investigator, Dr. Jami Berry at 404-668-5106 or jamiberry@uga.edu. You may also contact the co-investigator, Abby Gaines at 678-634-3777 or aeh59607@uga.edu. If you have any complaints or questions about your rights as a research volunteer, contact the IRB at 706-542-3199 or by email at IRB@uga.edu.

If you agree to participate in this research study, please sign below:

_____	_____	_____
Name of Researcher	Signature	Date
_____	_____	_____
Name of Participant	Signature	Date

Please keep one copy and return the signed copy to the researcher.

APPENDIX G

UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA
CONSENT FORM
DIFFERENTIATED SUPPORTS FOR ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TEACHERS TO INCREASE RESILIENCE AND SELF-EFFICACY

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You are being invited to be in this research study because you are a leader in a suburban elementary school.

Your participation in this study will assist the investigators in understanding your experiences as a leader.

If you agree to participate in this study:

- We will collect information about your perception of providing support to suburban elementary school teachers.
  We will ask you to participate in an in-person Focus group to build your capacity to provide differentiated support to the teachers you lead. These will take about 60 minutes each time.
  We will conduct two in-person interviews to better understand your experiences. The interview audio will be recorded and stored in a safe location that is password-protected. The interviews will last 30 minutes each time.
- We will collect information about your experiences through observations. The observation data will be stored in a safe location that is password-protected.
- The total research period will be three months and data will be collected throughout the duration of the research period.
- All information collected will be private; the use of pseudonyms and removal of identifying information will ensure anonymity.

Participation is voluntary. You can refuse to take part or stop at any time without penalty. Your decision to participate, not participate, or rescind your consent will have no impact on your evaluation or experiences as a teacher in your organization.

Throughout this study, investigators will work to eliminate or reduce any potential risk or discomfort. If you encounter a survey or reflection question that you find uncomfortable, you can skip these questions without answering them.

Your responses may help us understand how differentiated supports can impact the resilience and self-efficacy of suburban elementary school teachers. The data collected throughout this study may help us make recommendations to other elementary school leaders to increase their confidence and capacity to support elementary school teachers in the post-pandemic era.

We will take steps to protect your privacy, but there is a small risk that your information could be accidentally disclosed to people not connected to the research. To reduce this risk we will ensure that all identifiable information will be removed in any draft of the final form of the report. Additionally, all data will be collected and stored in a private location that is password-protected. We will only keep information that could identify you in a private location that is password-protected and only accessible by the investigator. This information will be destroyed after 5 years. No identifiable information will be shared in this study or for future studies.

This research involves the transmission of data over the Internet. Every reasonable effort has been taken to ensure the effective use of available technology; however, confidentiality during online communication cannot be guaranteed.

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If you agree to participate in this research study, please sign below:

_____	_____	_____
Name of Researcher	Signature	Date
_____	_____	_____
Name of Participant	Signature	Date

Please keep one copy and return the signed copy to the researcher.

APPENDIX H

Data Reflection Template

Narrowing the Focus

	Highest	Lowest
Type of Social Support Needed		
Ahas! From Support and Success definitions		
Self-Efficacy (Confidence)		
Resilience Factors		
Thoughts and Wonderings…		
Commitments:		

APPENDIX I

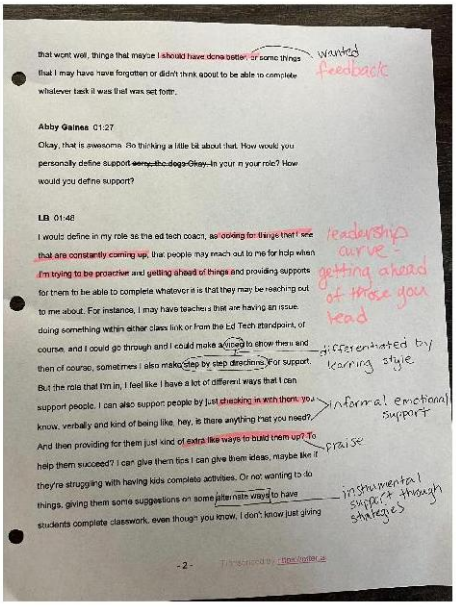
Lucas Pointe Elementary Teachers Self-Efficacy and Resilience Data

Self-Efficacy	Pre-Cycle	Post-Cycle	Resilience	Pre-Cycle	Post-Cycle
SPED	4.27381	3.96	SPED	4.257142	4.17
5th Grade	4.011904	3.9	5th Grade	4.471429	4.32
4th Grade	4.333333	4.22	4th Grade	4.261111	4.22
3rd Grade	4.297619	4.49	3rd Grade	4.671429	4.63
Lucas Pointe Teachers Average	**4.229166**	**4.1425**	Lucas Pointe Teachers Average	**4.415278**	**4.335**

APPENDIX J

Data Analysis

Memo Process



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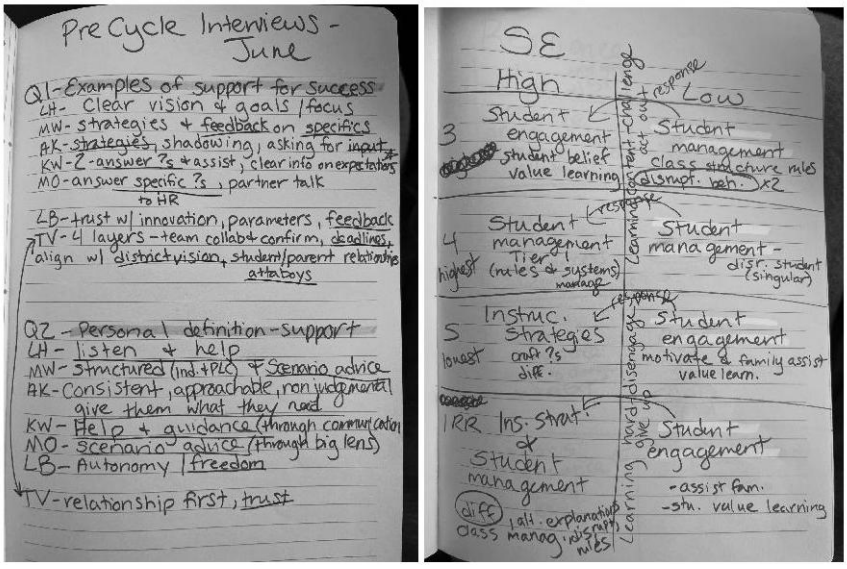

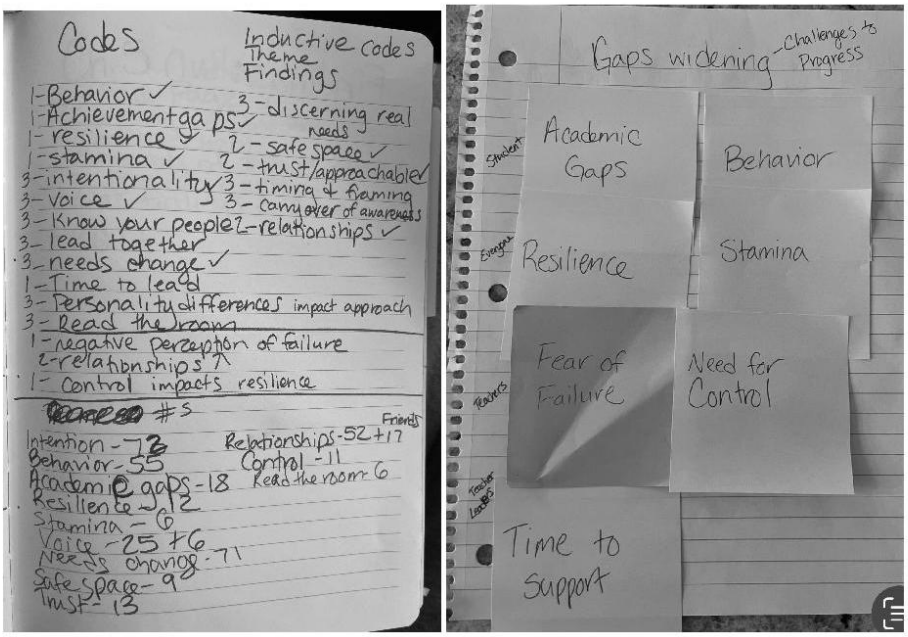

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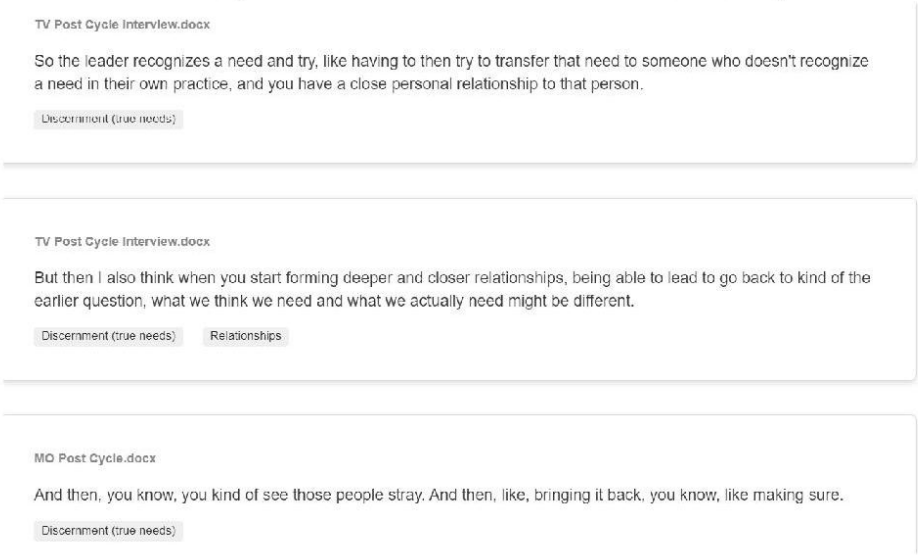

Tagging Quotes with Codes