

## **ABSTRACT**

LECORCHICK, JENNIFER LYNN. *The Whole Principal: Self-Care Practices of Principals Leading in Title 1 Schools.* (Under the direction of Dr. Jennifer Ayscue)

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive study is to explore the self-care practices of principals leading in Title 1 schools in one North Carolina school district. The participants in this study were all principals in Title 1 schools in one school district in North Carolina. The data was collected by a survey and by an interview process. The survey shows a big-picture overview of the current self-care practices of principals. The interview participants were purposely selected from participants who volunteered for this portion of the study. The data was analyzed by using descriptive coding for the survey and deductive and inductive coding for the interviews.

The findings from this study show the personal and professional self-care attitudes, beliefs, and practices of principals leading in Title 1 schools. The three themes related to personal self-care are: (1) Exercise, nutrition, and sleep are a priority for some principals but not all; (2) Psychological and emotional awareness is a must for all principals; and (3) Principals rely on their spirituality. Three themes related to professional self-care are: (1) Principals work hard and are intentional about setting limits for self-care; (2) Professional relationships and support are the key to success for some principals; (3) Self-advocacy is important for some principals but not all; and (4) Principals find the joy and trauma which boosts their energy. The central finding related to how race shapes principals' self-care is (1) Black principals perceive greater risk to their mental health.

Implications for policy, practice, and future research may begin at the university level targeting the principal preparation program to ensure that future principals have the knowledge and the ability to implement self-care practices for both their personal and professional life.

Universities and school districts may use this research to implement new research regarding the self-care practices of principals. Changes at the state level to the principal evaluation could hold the principal accountable for their well-being. Holding the school principal accountable for showing up physically and emotionally at peak performance for the entire school community could help ensure that stress levels are minimized and principal turnover decreases.

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The Whole Principal: Self-Care Practices of School Principals Leading in Title 1 Schools

by  
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## **BIOGRAPHY**

Jennifer Lecorchick has served as an educator in three districts within North Carolina in her educational career. As a teacher, she taught middle grades math and science and coached cheerleading before continuing to grow her leadership in the role of a STEM Coordinator. She is currently an assistant principal within the Wake County Public School System. She received her bachelor's degree in elementary education and master's degrees in school administration with an add-on focus in curriculum development from Duquesne University in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Her research focuses on healthy self-care practices both personally and professionally to increase overall well-being.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES .....	vi
LIST OF FIGURES.....	vii
<b>CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>1</b>
Research Problem Statement .....	1
Theoretical Framework.....	7
Purpose Statement .....	8
Research Questions.....	9
Definitions of Terms.....	10
Statement of Significance .....	11
Assumptions, Delimitations, and Limitations of the Study .....	12
Overview of the Organization.....	12
Summary .....	13
<b>CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW.....</b>	<b>14</b>
Background Information.....	14
The <i>Leandro</i> Case.....	15
Theoretical Framework.....	19
Impact of Stress on Principals .....	22
Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion .....	24
Self-Care Practices of Principals .....	28
Personal Self-Care Practices.....	28
Physical: The Importance of Sleep.....	29
Physical: The Importance of Exercise.....	30
Importance of Nutrition.....	31
Psychological and Emotional .....	32
Social, Leisure, and Spiritual .....	33
Professional Self-Care Practices.....	33
Workload, Time Management, and Attention to Professional Role .....	33
Revitalization and Generalization of Energy and Attention to Reactions at Work.....	34
Professional Social Support, Self-Advocacy, and Professional Development .....	35
Self-Care in Other Professions .....	35
Impact Leadership Has on Others.....	36
Conclusion .....	37
<b>CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY.....</b>	<b>38</b>
Positionality .....	38
Research Design .....	40
Qualitative Research.....	40
Descriptive Research .....	40
Site Selection and Participants .....	41
Instrumentation.....	42
Data Collection.....	43
Data Analysis.....	44
Trustworthiness or Credibility .....	45

Limitations and Delimitations .....	46
Conclusion .....	46
<b>CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS .....</b>	<b>47</b>
Participant Profiles.....	47
Mr. Clark .....	47
Ms. Harris .....	48
Ms. Young .....	48
Mr. Jones .....	48
Ms. Miller .....	49
Ms. Barnes.....	49
Ms. Woods.....	49
Ms. Foster .....	49
Mr. Henry .....	50
Research Question #1 .....	53
Exercise, Nutrition, and Sleep Are a Priority for Some Principals but Not All .....	54
Psychological and Emotional Awareness is a Must for All Principals .....	57
Principals Rely on Their Spirituality.....	61
Research Question #2.....	63
Principals Work Hard and Are Intentional About Setting Limits for Self-Care .....	64
Professional Relationships and Support are the Key to Success for Some .....	66
Self-Advocacy is Important for Some Principals but Not All.....	68
Principals Find the Joy and Trauma Which Boosts Their Energy .....	70
Research Question #3 .....	72
Black Principals Perceive Greater Risk to Their Mental Health.....	72
Chapter Summary .....	77
<b>CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION .....</b>	<b>79</b>
Purpose of the Study .....	79
Summary of Findings .....	79
Research Question 1 .....	79
Research Question 2 .....	80
Research Question 3 .....	80
Discussion of Findings .....	81
Summary .....	85
Reflections on The Self-Care Framework for Social Workers Theoretical Framework .....	86
Limitations .....	87
Implications of the Study for Policy and Practice .....	88
Implications for Policy .....	88
Implications for Practice.....	89
Recommendations for Future Research .....	90
Conclusion .....	91
<b>REFERENCES.....</b>	<b>93</b>
<b>APPENDICES.....</b>	<b>104</b>
Appendix A: Qualtrics Survey.....	105
Appendix B: Interview Protocol .....	107

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 3.1	Research Questions	44
Table 4.1	Summary of Participant Characteristics	50
Table 4.2	Summary of Survey Participant Characteristics	51
Table 4.3	Research Questions and Themes	51
Table 4.4	Principals' Frequency of Exercise	53
Table 4.5	Principals' Frequency of Missed Meals Due to Work	54
Table 4.6	Principals' Frequency of Waking Up in the Middle of Sleep	54
Table 4.7	Principals' Frequency of Sacrificing Personal Relationships for Work	56
Table 4.8	Principals' Frequency of Leisure Activities	57
Table 4.9	Principals' Frequency of Spiritual Engagement	60
Table 4.10	Principals Take Small Breaks During the Day	62
Table 4.11	Principals Limit Work Discussion Outside of Work	63
Table 4.12	Principals' Use of Professional Supports to Grow Skill Sets	65
Table 4.13	Principals' Seek Out Professional Mentorship	66
Table 4.15	Principals' Advocate for Their Own Needs	67
Table 4.16	Principals Have Systems and Structures to Remind Them of Their Passions	68
Table 4.17	Principals' Agreeance of Spirituality by Race	82
Table 4.18	Principals' Engagement in Exercise by Race	82
Table 4.19	Principals' Psychological Awareness by Race	86



## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 2.1 Theoretical Framework

22

## **CHAPTER 1:INTRODUCTION**

School principals encounter stressors that are more intense than the stressors that people encounter in other careers (Riley, 2017). Principals experience significantly higher rates of burn-out, stress, and sleeplessness than other professions (Riley, 2017). In January of 2022, Steiner et al. (2022) conducted a survey with a nationally representative sample of 1,532 principals and 2,360 teachers and found that 85% of principals were experiencing job-related stress, compared with 73% of teachers and 35% of other working adults. The school principal often has feelings of ultimate responsibility, which potentially compound as these leaders work to uphold unrealistic accountability and instructional leadership expectations (Spillane & Lee, 2014). Forty-eight percent of principals were dealing with burn-out, while 28% reported symptoms of depression, 85% of principals reported job-related stress, and 19% of principals reported not coping well with stress overall (Sullivan, 2022).

### **Research Problem Statement**

Researchers suggest that self-care offsets work-related stress (O'Halloran & Linton, 2000). A study by Lee and Miller (2013) stated that "a chronic lack of self-care" is noted as a frequent consequence for many helping professionals as they struggle to prioritize their own well-being while focusing on the needs of clients, which in this case, would apply to principals who are helping teachers and students (Figley, 2002; Skovholt et al., 2001).

The need exists for school districts to create policies, professional development, systems, and structures to ensure opportunities for developing personal and professional self-care practices are offered to school principals. The opportunity to establish self-care practices is important for all principals, as overworked principals who fail to prioritize their own self-care may see this neglect reflected in their performance (Mahfouz, 2018). Barling and Cloutier (2017)

found a link between the mental health of leaders and the ability of organizations to thrive and provide services. In education, this link would translate to the principal's mental health being related to the ability of the school to thrive and serve students effectively. Further, a recent survey of principals in Washington, D.C. showed that 67% of principals plan to leave the profession within the first five years (Moore, 2018). This data demonstrates the importance of prioritizing the self-care of school principals.

Self-care is understood as engagement in behaviors that support one's health and well-being (Lee & Miller, 2013). Two working definitions exist that are important to this study of self-care: personal self-care and professional self-care. Personal self-care is defined as “a process of purposeful engagement in practices that promote holistic health and well-being of the self” (Lee & Miller, 2013, p. 98). Professional self-care is defined “as the process of purposeful engagement in practices that promote effective and appropriate use of the self in the professional role within the context of sustainable holistic health and well-being” (Lee & Miller, 2013, p. 98).

School district leaders are aware that a need exists to focus on the mental health of employees; for example, in some districts, self-care is becoming part of the district's strategic plan. Having policies, professional development, systems, and structures in place at the school district level could help support the self-care practices of the building principal. These systems and structures may include training for the principal that makes the connection between self-care practices and mental health. Knowledge about how to integrate self-care practices must be developed for principals to build a strong framework for self-care and allow for a more inclusive discussion about the practice to occur (Lee & Miller, 2013). This training could help support and empower the individual principal, and it could also assist in the equitable leadership of a diverse population of the school community. The principal, who has well-developed self-care practices,

also has personal and professional skill sets and tools to manage psychological and emotional stress. The principal will likely demonstrate an understanding of the importance of self-advocacy and professional social support as relationships in their practice are essential to collaborate with other leaders of like populations.

The connection between self-care and diversity, equity, and inclusion is close. According to Staglin (2022), “Employees from diverse backgrounds can face lack of representation, micro-aggressions, unconscious bias, and other stressors that impact their mental health and psychological safety at work” (p. 1). Principals who have developed personal and professional self-care practices will likely have tools available to use in instances when they experience stressors, including various forms of discrimination. These tools may be in the form of knowing how to respond appropriately if micro-aggressions occur. For instance, having the resources and tools to be able to handle micro-aggressions allows the school principal to continue leading the entire school community without experiencing an extremely negative impact on their mental health. Literature supports the necessity of self-care practices for Black people and their holistic health due to racism. Self-care practices can be a tool for social justice for Black people and survival for marginalized communities (Wyatt & Ampadu, 2022). Principals can utilize these tools before they begin their careers through principal preparation programs, during their careers through professional development at the district level, or in a personal setting through therapy.

Communication is essential in a principal's role; therefore, keeping an open mind and respecting an employee's boundaries when they disclose sensitive mental health issues demonstrate that a diverse community is welcome and that the employee can work in a psychologically safe place. This communication relates to the principal self-care practices because the principal is oftentimes the first person an employee will report sensitive information

to when confidentiality and trust has been established in the workplace. The principal must be keenly aware of the impact that secondary traumatic stress can have on their own emotional and psychological well-being when situations occur. Secondary traumatic stress is the stress others endure when they hear of the traumatic experiences of another (Peterson, 2018). Almost 60% of employees have never spoken to anyone at work about their mental health status (Greenwood et al., 2019). Principals may be the first people for employees to speak to about mental health status, thus school principals must be prepared with an appropriate response when they are approached by employees who may be looking for support. Principals have many tasks to execute daily; hence, having the proper skill sets to seamlessly move from one potentially stressful task to another and to remain focused is an essential part of the principalship. These self-care practices, both personal and professional, will likely help the principal implement the tools when needed so that they can process through stressful situations.

With proper education and training, the principal has the opportunity to perform at their peak, including in times of stress. If a traumatic situation, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, were to arise, a principal who is well-trained in self-care practices would likely be able to implement personal and professional practices that could aid them in having strong leadership. Self-care demonstrates strong leadership because it shows others that the principal respects themselves to implement practices and gives permission for others to do the same. Principal self-care practices can be implemented as a way to prevent illness, but perhaps more importantly, they demonstrate to employees that they respect themselves enough to present their best, personally and professionally. A principal who is well-trained in self-care practices will likely have better tools and resources to prevent secondary traumatic stress, burn-out, and high turnover, which may enable the principal to proactively support their overall health, well-being, and resilience (Lee &

Miller, 2013). When teachers within the school observe the principal creating excellent self-care practices, this modeling may create a culture within the school that places importance on self-care practices. The self-care practices can lead to a school culture that prioritizes well-being and mental health as a whole.

When made a priority, personal and professional self-care practices can increase the well-being and mental health of the entire school (Mahfouz & Richardson, 2021). School districts may consider adding mental health into their strategic plan, which could help give building leaders a vision for the school year. When the school principal focuses on self-care practices and makes the mental health of the teachers, parents, and students a priority, the entire school community could have buy-in to the idea that self-care practices are important for everyone. The principal could move self-care practices to the forefront of the school's vision, knowing that self-care is essential for effective mental health and the well-being of the entire school community.

As our world battled the COVID-19 pandemic, educators and scholars quickly noticed that the COVID-19 pandemic magnified the disparities already present for many populations of students, such as students who are low wealth (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights, 2021). Many populations were under stress due to uncertainties and drastic changes. Principals were under extra stress from the responsibility of moving to remote learning overnight, disbursing technology to students, supporting teachers with online learning platforms, and the stress of raising their learning capacity (Hayes et al., 2022). Principals were dealing with a high rate of stress due to teacher turnover and dealing with the shortage that resulted (Steiner et al., 2022). They experienced added stress due to lower attendance rates and the challenge of finding students. Some students with food insecurity utilized the school as a way to meet their nutritional needs, which is another stressor that principals had to endure during the pandemic

(U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, 2021). With all of the changes that have happened since the COVID-19 pandemic, this time is ideal to focus on the whole principal. The whole principal is focusing on self-care practices in addition to the academic and field training of the principal. Principals deserve the attention, support, and resources that have been neglected over the years (Grissom et al., 2021).

The school principal has a demanding career. Awareness of both personal and professional self-care practices could assist with being both proactive and preventative with regard to mental health, principal turnover, and overall well-being. For example, leaders may understand the importance of exercising, eating a healthy diet, and having adequate sleep patterns, but actually implementing these aspects of personal self-care practices is often overlooked by some leaders. Some leaders have random sleep patterns or wake up in the middle of the night due to work-related stress (Barnes, 2018). Putting proper boundaries in place allows time for personal self-care to be put into practice, and the principal will likely be healthier overall. The principal could also model these practices for their teachers as well as the entire school community. District leaders could start with the awareness that a difference exists between personal and professional self-care, which is currently not being practiced among many principals (King et al., 2016). From the professional lens, the district has practices in place that principals are participating in, such as professional development. Some principals may be unknowingly practicing parts of professional self-care and some may not even know that it exists. Therefore, awareness of the different types of self-care is very important.

The *Leandro* case, which was filed in 1997 by five low-wealth counties in North Carolina, highlights the disparities in financial resources, student achievement, and human capital among districts in North Carolina, specifically the inequities that exist for low-income

rural districts (Hudson, 2017). Data from the U.S. Department of Education states that 40% of high-poverty schools are not receiving an equitable share of state and local funds (NASSP, 2019). Principals at high-poverty schools may lead a school on limited budgets. These challenges include hiring teachers, securing classroom resources, obtaining safety instructors, and much more (NASSP, 2019). Students living in poverty may have fewer resources at home to assist in their education outside of school. Challenges they may face include homelessness, food scarcity, and lower levels of parent engagement as parents often work several jobs or longer hours, which translates into being unable to help with the student's homework outside of school (NASSP, 2019).

Principals who serve high poverty communities must find experienced teachers, secure adequate funding, obtain resources in and outside of schools, and facilitate parent engagement. These examples show that principals who serve in Title 1 schools manage extra challenges. Having proper training and awareness of personal and professional self-care practices could aid the principal in executing their role, and the many tasks that it entails, to the best of their ability (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017).

### **Theoretical Framework**

The idea of focusing on self-care in addition to the academic and field training of the principal defines the whole principal. The relationship between the principal and the personal and professional self-care practices that they utilize could impact how effective the principal is at leading the school. The framework for this study promotes the development of self-care practices that are best for the individual principal as a person inside and outside of the school. The principal position of a school can be very isolating which can cause burn-out. "Self-care may not only be crucial in preventing secondary traumatic stress, burn-out, and high staff turnover, but it



can serve as a means of empowerment that enables practitioners to proactively and intentionally negotiate their overall health, well-being, and resilience” (Lee & Miller, 2013, p. 96).

The self-care framework for social workers consists of personal and professional self-care and will guide this study (Lee & Miller, 2013). Lee and Miller have identified five primary pillars for personal self-care: (a) physical, (b) social, (c) leisure, (d) psychological/emotional, and (e) spiritual. Lee and Miller have also identified six pillars for professional self-care: (a) workload and time management, (b) professional social support and self-advocacy, (c) revitalization and generalization of energy, (d) attention to the professional role, (e) professional development, and (f) attention to reactions at work.

The theoretical framework will guide this study in several ways. Chapter 2 will strengthen the need for self-care practices by using existing research to justify the importance and the need for professional and personal self-care practice for principals. Chapter 3 will describe how the theoretical framework will guide the data collection and analysis of the study. The participants will engage in a survey to collect basic data about personal and professional self-care practices that they are currently practicing. The framework will also guide the interview process, which will use a qualitative descriptive approach and allow for more insight into current self-care practices.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this descriptive qualitative study is to explore the self-care practices of principals leading in Title 1 schools within one North Carolina school district. Specifically, the findings from this study may help school-level principals navigate the stress of the daily job, increase overall health, and decrease principal turnover rates. This research may empower principals in taking ownership of their self-care practices both personally and professionally. The

qualitative approach informs the research by allowing me to observe the world in which the participant interacts. This study will collect qualitative data through interviews and surveys. Qualitative research is the best approach because it allows the participants to tell their stories around the questions asked (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Interviews give the participants the time to process the questions and the wait time to give a well-thought-out answer to a question. For this study, I will utilize descriptive research as it allows me to focus on the interviewee's real-life experiences and then analyze what the participant shared (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

I will use Lee and Miller's (2013) self-care framework for social workers because a focus exists on both the personal and professional needs of self-care. I chose this framework because of the focus on traumatic stress, burn-out, and high staff turnover, but it can also serve as a means of empowerment that enables practitioners to proactively and intentionally negotiate their overall health, well-being, and resilience (Lee & Miller, 2013). This framework draws attention to the need for principals to implement self-care practices in both their personal and professional lives. For this study, I will center the research around the following questions.

### **Research Questions**

- What are the personal self-care attitudes, beliefs, and practices of principals leading in Title 1 schools in one North Carolina school district?
- What are the professional self-care attitudes, beliefs, and practices of principals leading in Title 1 schools in one North Carolina school district?
- What, if any, differences exist in self-care attitudes, beliefs, and practices among principals of different races in Title 1 schools in one North Carolina school district?

## Definitions of Terms

**Burn-out syndrome.** Burn-out is a syndrome resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed (World Health Organization, n.d.). It is characterized by three dimensions: feelings of energy depletion or exhaustion, increased mental distance from one's job, feelings of negativism or cynicism related to one's job, and reduced professional efficacy. Burn-out refers specifically to phenomena in the occupational context and should not be applied to describe experiences in other areas of life (World Health Organization, nd.).

**Diversity.** Diversity is a worldwide phenomenon. Diversity issues and developments in nations around the world, including the United States, are intricately connected. The full spectrum of diversity issues includes race, class, gender, religion, language, exceptionality, and the global dimensions of diversity are related to education (Banks, 2012).

**Equity.** "Equity in education means full inclusion and educational excellence for every child, not just welcoming every child but ensuring the opportunity to learn based on what each student needs" (Theoharis, 2021, para 1).

**Inclusion.** Inclusion refers to how diversity is leveraged to create a fair, equitable, healthy, and high-performing organization or community where all individuals are respected, feel engaged and motivated, and their contributions toward meeting organizational and societal goals are valued (O'Mara & Richter, 2011).

**Mental health.** Mental health includes emotional, psychological, and social well-being. It affects how we think, feel, and act. It also helps determine how we handle stress, relate to others, and make healthy choices (CDC, 2023).

**Personal self-care.** Personal self-care is a process of purposeful engagement in practices that promote holistic health and well-being of the self (Lee & Miller, 2013).

**Professional self-care.** Professional self-care is a process of purposeful engagement in practices that promote effective and appropriate use of the self in the professional role within the context of sustainable holistic health and well-being (Lee & Miller, 2013).

**Self-Care.** Self-care is understood as engagement in behaviors that support one's health and well-being (Lee & Miller, 2013).

**Stress.** Stress is a state of worry or mental tension caused by a difficult situation (World Health Organization, n.d.). Stress is a natural human response that prompts us to address challenges and threats in our lives. Everyone experiences stress to some degree (World Health Organization, n.d.).

**Turnover.** The number of persons hired within a period to replace those leaving or dropped from a workforce (Webster Dictionary, 2023).

### **Statement of Significance**

School leaders must promote healthy self-care practices because the self-care practices likely have a direct impact not only on students' academic achievement and social-emotional growth but also on the entire school community (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education, 2021). The mental health of the entire school community has become a critical need to the point that many school districts are addressing the concerns through the district's strategic plan. District leaders may utilize the findings of this study to inform their strategic plan. District leaders may take the information from this research and apply it to develop more mental health literacy and facilitate professional development for principals that would lead toward improvement and equitable practices. State and district leadership may also use this research in the teacher evaluation process; it could help principals to understand the stress levels of teachers and how stress impacts their work.

Reviewing the findings from this study may prompt district leaders to collect data to assess the wellness needs of school-level principals. Making physical and mental health a priority is important. Along with making it a priority, education on the stigmas of mental health may open doors for more principals to access health care or at least start a conversation that is psychologically safe. These steps may help with well-being and professional self-care practices. All district departments may make it a point to focus on personal and professional self-care so that it is a district-wide focus. With the proper policies, professional development, and systems and structures in place, burn-out among principals may decrease. Increasing mental health literacy from the university during principal preparation programs and also through professional development at the district level will likely add to the holistic education of the principal. Increasing mental health literacy through personal and professional self-care practices will add to the principal's capacity to serve the school community.

### **Assumptions, Delimitations, and Limitations of the Study**

In this study, one must recognize assumptions, delimitations, and limitations because they shape the design of the study and affect the outcomes of the study. Assumptions in this study are that each participant reflected on the questions and gave a truthful answer. A delimitation of the study is that the researcher made a choice to study one school district in North Carolina where several of the schools are Title 1, which meets the criteria of being low-wealth. Limitations of this study begin with the participants being honest with the answers to the questions that the researcher asked during the interview.

### **Overview of the Organization**

Chapter 1 gives background information, a problem statement, and the purpose of the study. Chapter 1 concludes with three research questions that drive the study. Chapter 2

highlights relevant research with a literature review and also identifies gaps in the literature where further research is needed. Chapter 3 provides the methods used along with the justification for the methods, an explanation of the data collection procedures, a description of the participants, and a focus on how the data was analyzed. Chapter 4 is an analysis of the findings. Chapter 5 is the conclusion of the study and includes a discussion of implications for future research, policy, and practice.

### **Summary**

This qualitative study explores the self-care practices of principals in Title 1 schools in a North Carolina school district. This study examines both the personal and professional self-care practices of principals. Principals report stressors of accountability to close the achievement gap and career-related stress that may influence or impact things from student achievement to principal turnover rates. Principals must be prepared for their careers and effectively know and understand policy, systems, and structures, and when to attend appropriate professional development as it pertains to their own personal and professional self-care practices. School districts may need to address the policy, systems and structures, and professional development at the district level to ensure that self-care is a priority for the employee. We expect that principal preparation programs are educating principals equipped with the knowledge to lead schools in a diverse community. When looking at the leadership of the school, the principal is constantly taking care of so many other stakeholders; therefore, the question still remains, has the principal been trained in proper implementation of self-care practices, both personally and professionally? For principals to be considered well-trained, they not only need to meet the educational requirements, but they also need to meet the self-care practices for personal and professional practices.

## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Background Information**

Over the past decade, school-based principals in the United States have had a lot of stress from dealing with high-stakes testing, funding inadequacies, school shootings, natural disasters, and societal turmoil. On top of the stress associated with the typical day-to-day operations of running a school, principals have had to manage additional stress from teacher walkouts, racial injustices, and school closures. All of the added stress has heightened the awareness of how principals manage their stress while maintaining healthy self-care practices, not only for themselves but also for the health of the school community. As we look at the whole principal, our schools must have well-trained, high-quality principals leading schools every single day (Meyer et al., 2017). Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative descriptive study is to explore the self-care practices of principals leading Title 1 schools within a North Carolina district. Specifically, the findings from this study may help school-level principals navigate the stress of the daily job, increase overall health, and decrease principal turnover rates. This study investigates three research questions:

1. What are the personal self-care attitudes, beliefs, and practices of principals leading in Title 1 schools in one North Carolina school district?
2. What are the professional self-care attitudes, beliefs, and practices of principals leading in Title 1 schools in one North Carolina school district?
3. What, if any, differences exist in self-care attitudes, beliefs, and practices among principals of different races in Title 1 schools in one North Carolina school district?

This literature review will describe North Carolina's history of what equitable, sound, and basic education means for all students in the state. To do so, this literature review leads with an

overview of the *Leandro* case and focuses on recommendations from the case that are related to principals. Following the initial historical background of the *Leandro* case, I will provide an introduction to the theoretical framework. Next, the literature review will explore the impact of stress on principals; the relationship between self-care and diversity, equity, and inclusion; each of the theoretical framework's elements of personal and professional self-care; similarities with self-care in other professions; and the impact leadership has on others.

The Supreme Court of North Carolina affirmed the expectation to have high-quality and academically well-trained principals, but stress also impacts the principal's personal and professional life, which could lead to health concerns or add to principal turnover rates. When a holistic view of the principal is used, one must recognize the need for access to personal and professional self-care practices. If principals are able to address self-care practices both personally and professionally, a decrease in principal turnover rates may occur.

### **The *Leandro* Case**

In 1994, a lawsuit was filed against the State of North Carolina by families (Plaintiffs), including the Leandro family, students, and school districts. These families were from five low-wealth counties within North Carolina: Cumberland, Hoke, Halifax, Robeson, and Vance. They argued that despite higher-than-average tax rates, schools in these districts had lower-than-average tax revenue. Thus, schools in these five districts did not have money to provide an equal education for their students. These five districts could not compete with other higher-resourced school districts in terms of higher pay for teachers, special education services, and educational resources (Children's Law Clinic, 2023).

The plaintiffs argued that the quality of their children's education should not be based on the wealth of the family and the community. "It costs more to properly educate disadvantaged



children, but the state has not done enough to equalize school funding across NC” (Children's Law Clinic, 2023). Later in the case, urban districts were able to join the lawsuit as they brought attention to the fact that the State Constitution requires North Carolina to provide students everywhere with adequate resources to fully educate disadvantaged students, special education students, and English learners.

In 1997, the Supreme Court of North Carolina affirmed that the state must provide every student with an equitable, sound, and basic education (Granados, 2019). The *Leandro* case highlighted the disparities among school districts with regard to financial resources, human capital, and academic achievement, with specific concern about low-income rural districts and economically disadvantaged students (Hudson, 2017). WestEd is an independent contractor that Judge David Lee appointed to develop recommendations to meet the mandates of the *Leandro* case (Granados, 2019). WestEd worked with two other independent contractors, the Learning Policy Institute and the Friday Institute for Educational Innovation at North Carolina State University, to meet the needs. To better understand key issues and challenges, they analyzed data to explore student achievement, workforce, state funding, and school effectiveness, along with other areas. Interviews were conducted with school administrators, teachers, parents, and community members. To make the data that was collected more comprehensive, they also conducted focus groups along with cost analysis and minimum cost analysis to achieve educational outcomes. The data included diverse types of schools, different school levels, and different regions of the state. One of the recommendations of the *Leandro* case is that school systems provide access to high-quality and well-trained principals to ensure that all students are on track for success. The *Leandro* decision affirmed a critical need for high-quality principals in every school. The WestEd Action Plan shows progress in meeting the congressional needs but

progress still needs to be made in the area of well-trained principals. North Carolina does have innovative principal preparation programs that meet National Educational Leadership Preparation standards, and perhaps adding the recommendations from WestEd will improve the principal preparation programs. The WestEd report detailed eight central findings related to principals and four recommendations.

Findings:

1. There is a strong evidence-based consensus about the elements needed for an effective principal preparation program, including one that prepares principals for high-need schools.
2. North Carolina principals are prepared through multiple pathways, which have different outcomes on the supply and retention of principals.
3. North Carolina has made significant progress in building innovative and effective principal preparation programs that incorporate recommended best practices.
4. North Carolina Principal Fellows scholarship programs successfully attract strong candidates to principal preparation programs.
5. Although there are high-quality preparation programs in the state, there are fewer principals.
6. School leaders need ongoing professional learning opportunities, and North Carolina has well-designed programs for current principals and assistant principals that need to be scaled up.
7. The current compensation system creates disincentives for principals to remain in the principalship and creates disincentives for effective principals to work in underperforming schools that often take more than one year to improve.

8. Working conditions influence principal retention.

Recommendations:

1. Update the state's principal preparation and principal licensure requirements.
2. Continue to expand access to high-quality principal preparation programs.
3. Expand the professional learning opportunities for current principals and assistant principals.
4. Revise the principal and assistant principal salary structure and improve working conditions to make these positions more attractive to qualified educators, especially those in high-need schools. (WestEd et al., 2019)

The WestEd report states that some high-quality professional development exists, but they do not meet the statewide needs (WestEd et al., 2019). Very important to this study, the summary brings awareness to working conditions, such as workload, job complexity, support, and resources, for principals serving in low-performing schools which could lead to burn-out in the career (WestEd et al., 2019). Although the recommendations made from the *Leandro* case do not clearly define what a well-trained, high-quality principal looks like, this study might add insight into the self-care practices that could be part of preparing well-trained school-based leaders who serve in Title 1 schools with large shares of high poverty students.

In response to the state Supreme Court affirming that every student must be provided a well-trained principal, preparation programs, such as those at North Carolina State University (NCSU), became more intentional with recruitment efforts to attract diverse teachers with strong leadership potential who have had success working with students from underserved populations (Fusarelli et al., 2018). Overall, the *Leandro* case highlighted the disparities in resources,

achievement, and human capital among districts, specifically low-income rural districts and economically disadvantaged students (Hudson, 2017).

### **Theoretical Framework**

Lee and Miller's (2013) self-care framework for social workers is a helpful framework for guiding this study for several reasons. First, although it was originally designed for social work, others can use the concepts across professions, including education. Second, the framework gives a clear definition of self-care. Finally, self-care may not only be critical in preventing secondary traumatic stress, burn-out, and high turnover, but it can also be very empowering in that it may enable principals to proactively negotiate their overall health, well-being, and resilience (Lee & Miller, 2013). Lee and Miller recognize that there is a difference between personal and professional self-care practices for social workers' careers. Because this framework can be used across settings, it will be applied to school-based principals for this study.

Lee and Miller (2013) identified five primary structures of support for personal self-care. The first structure is physical, which may include adequate sleep, exercise, proper nutritional choice, and prevention of illness. Second, psychological and emotional support includes health emotional regulation, growing behavioral changes, and being able to change as the individual's environment changes. Third, social support means building and maintaining a support structure within your community. Fourth, leisure typically is somewhat relaxing, including spending time with family and friends, reading, or playing a fun sport. Fifth, spirituality is connected to faith, prayer, peace, and fostering a time for reflection or meditation.

As for professional self-care, Lee and Miller (2013) have identified six primary areas. First, workload and time management relate to the employee having mindful management of

work tasks and time spent accomplishing work tasks. This area means structuring the work to meet both the clients' and workers' needs, or in this case, the needs of the principal as well as the needs of the staff and students, which could include reorganizing schedules to prioritize working hours to allow for tasks to be completed. Second, attention to the professional role, which could involve the principal implementing structures in place that align with the practitioner's job description. This area may also allow for a sense of value for the employee since their work has been connected to the goals. Third, attention to reactions to work assesses the practitioner to notice and honor their reactions at work. Self-awareness is key with this step; therefore, activities to assist in the management of attention to reactions could include mindfulness activities, personal therapy, journaling, and debriefing with colleagues. Fourth, professional social support and self-advocacy include encouragement, constructive feedback, or education from peers. For this framework, Lee and Miller (2013) extend the capacity of this part of professional self-care to involve scheduling regular meetings to problem-solve and developing networks for education, training, and community events. Self-advocacy examines how the practitioner identifies, researches, and advocates for change. Fifth, professional development is the knowledge of self in professional roles. The well-being is contingent upon the knowledge of how the principal goes about using self in the professional workplace. Two types of professional development exist, formal and informal. Formal professional development could mean joining a professional organization, whereas informal may mean learning from a colleague. Sixth, revitalization and generation of energy are very important to sustain effectiveness and professional well-being. This area could involve seeking out innovative approaches to address work-related challenges, revisiting positive outcomes from past experiences, engaging in community work events, and creating a pleasant working environment. Being able to identify and attend to individual self-care

practices both professionally and personally will likely aid in maximizing professional growth and promoting overall well-being.

Brown et al. (2019) have used this framework to examine higher education and how to effectively educate and prepare social workers before they enter the field. This research includes retention of the social worker within the field before they have even graduated from the preparation program. A recent study explored the self-care framework in higher education for Black social workers (Brown et al., 2019). The researchers modified the framework to define micro-aggressions in the social work education program. They also used the framework to prompt dialogue in enhancing the social worker's preparation program. Specifically in a study with a focus on racial micro-aggressions and Black social work students, this framework helped to prompt critically informed dialogue to enhance how the social work profession understands the role of micro-aggressions in social work educational contexts and to identify the unique needs and challenges of Black social work students. The research helped to develop strategies to effectively recruit, retain, and support social workers. Another study uses Lee and Miller's (2013) self-care framework to define, highlight, and give examples of professional and personal self-care practices for social workers (Bressi & Vaden, 2017). The framework has not yet been used in the kindergarten to 12th grade field. However, Lee and Miller (2013) directly state that this framework is appropriate for the education field along with others.

This theoretical framework guided the research questions in my study as I focused on exploring both personal and professional self-care practices of principals. In terms of data collection, when I administered the surveys and conducted interviews with principals from Title I schools in the selected school district, I aligned the questions with the different components of personal and professional self-care practices.

**Figure 2.1**

*Theoretical Framework*



Lee and Miller's Self-Care Framework for Social Workers (Lee & Miller, 2013)

### **Impact of Stress on Principals**

The principalship often results in feelings of “ultimate responsibility,” which potentially compound as leaders work to uphold unrealistic accountability and instructional leadership expectations (Spillane & Lee, 2014). Some principals may begin to accept the state of chronic stress as one that is outside of their control, given the new mandates and increased accountability, from issues such as high stakes testing in their world (Brock & Grady, 2002). Research from New Zealand suggested that principals experience significantly higher rates of burnout, stress, and sleeplessness than other professions (Riley, 2017). A recent survey of principals in Washington, D.C. showed that 67% of principals plan to leave the profession within the first five years (Moore, 2018).

The demands of the principal's career have taken a turn since the COVID-19 pandemic. The role has evolved from principals consistently trying to raise student achievement with

limited funding to a vastly different role which has brought a different awareness to the stress levels of our school leaders. Overnight, principals have had to become the chief communicators for the entire school community, COVID tracers, and leaders of online learning and technology. They had to keep in mind the emotional well-being of all of the students and staff and oversee food distribution sites all while shifting learning online. Researchers conducted a survey of teachers, principals, and working adults in January of 2022 (Steiner et al., 2022). Their study included 2,349 participating teachers, 1,532 participating principals, and 500 other participating adults. The survey results found that 85% of principals were experiencing job-related stress, compared with 73% of teachers and 35% of other working adults. 48% of principals were dealing with burn-out, while 28% reported symptoms of depression (Sullivan, 2022).

The emotional stress of educational leaders, although documented, has received little attention in the form of help for practicing school leaders. Perhaps having accountability in state standards, licensure requirements, or university courses will force principals to prioritize their self-care (Ginsberg, 2008). If principals are not aware of the adverse effects of stress levels, they may manifest into medical conditions, low productivity, increased absenteeism, or other problems (Sorenson, 2007). Self-care practices may be useful to address the stress and burn-out that principals experience.

Principal turnover has been a critical concern over the past few years, which has increased due to principal burn-out. To understand the term burn-out, the World Health Organization (WHO, n.d.) defines burn-out as a syndrome resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed. According to Davis et al. (2022), principal burn-out resembles work overload, lack of control, insufficient rewards, unfair treatment, breakdown of community, values conflict, and lack of fit with the job. Principal burn-out leads to principal



turnover, which may lead to teacher turnover, and can cause lower student achievement. In neighborhoods that have high student mobility or high poverty, the principal must be as stable as possible to ensure a strong school culture and positive academic gains from the students. When a principal has a solid work-life balance, they adopt positive practices and show acceptance, compassion, trust, and patience, and listen to others' concerns in a nonjudgmental, caring, and empathic way (Davis et al., 2022). According to Steiner et al. (2022), principals who experienced frequent job-related stress, burn-out, and symptoms of depression, who were not coping well with their job-related stress, or who had higher exposure to violence were 11% more likely to leave their jobs due to burn-out. In this survey, the researchers were able to link burn-out and racial discrimination to principal turnover before the COVID-19 pandemic even hit the United States.

### **Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion**

Mental health and self-care are not new ideas but an increased and new focus on these concepts has occurred in the workplace since the COVID-19 pandemic. Employees from diverse backgrounds can feel a lack of psychological safety or other stressors that could affect their mental health. Black and Hispanic individuals may be affected by stressors exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, due to higher exposure to chronic stressors and lower socioeconomic status they experience in the United States in comparison to White individuals (Al-Amin et al., 2023). During the same time as the COVID-19 pandemic, as a result of police violence including the murder of Black people, the Black Lives Matter movement spread. Protests against racism and injustices spread across the United States. These events led to a backlash against "critical race theory" and other anti-racism efforts in some schools (Clarida, 2023). Managing the stress from the racial trauma and other conflict that occurred in schools added to the work and stress of

the principal, particularly for Black principals (Clarida, 2023). The effects of stress by race and socioeconomic status show a direct correlation between diversity and inclusion. As mentioned in Chapter 1, a close connection exists between self-care and diversity, equity, and inclusion. According to Staglin (2022), “Employees from diverse backgrounds can face lack of representation, micro-aggressions, unconscious bias, and other stressors that impact their mental health and psychological safety at work” (p. 1). Today, a third of Americans have reported dealing with anxiety, depression, grief, or isolation (Fowers & Wan, 2020). The survey showed that of all of the respondents, African American people were most likely to not demonstrate symptoms of depression (27%) in comparison to White and Latinx, which reported at 19% each (Reunion Neuroscience Inc., 2021). The heightened awareness of mental health also relates to racial inequities and how people experience mental health (CDC, 2023). Clay (2016) shows that race is a predictor of mental health services utilization. A meta-analysis showed that African Americans are 21% less likely to use mental health services when compared to Whites. Hispanics and Latinos are 25% less likely to utilize mental health services in comparison to Whites (Clay, 2016). The CDC (2023) explained that people have assumed that the lack of utilization of mental health services was a matter of socioeconomic status as well as a difference in income and health insurance, access to the use of care, and affordability. He also raised awareness that some contributing factors to lower utilization rates are stigma, access to providers, discrimination, and lack of coverage. Racism is a large obstacle to healthcare. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC, 2023) defines racism as policy, practices, and norms that assign value and opportunity to the way people look or the color of their skin, resulting in conditions that unfairly advantage or disadvantage others. These conditions leave people of color with a greater risk of poor healthcare outcomes and disparities. Gaps in health care coverage can

also be examined by race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. The CDC (2023) describes race as an independent predictor of mental health usage. Because of the large impact on both the employee and community, employers should access mental health as an inclusive, ethical new strategic priority (Staglin, 2022). Gillison (2020), the chief executive officer of the National Alliance on Mental Illness, stated

The effect of racism and racial trauma on mental health is real and cannot be ignored.

The disparity in access to mental health care in communities of color cannot be ignored.

The inequality and lack of cultural competency in mental health treatment cannot be ignored. (p.1)

Thus, principals from different racial groups likely have different experiences with racism, mental health, and access to mental health care services. Further, the whole principal will not only be well-trained in the academic world but also have the self-care practices and knowledge base to lead a diverse population of staff members, students, and families who have experienced mental health concerns in different ways, which may be partially due to their race. One way to improve cultural competency around mental health care in the United States could be by starting with the professional development of our school leaders.

According to a survey conducted by Steiner et al. (2022), in 2021, 48% of principals of color had experienced at least one incident of racial discrimination at their school in the 2021-2022 school year. Also, 56% of Black principals indicated that they had experienced at least one incident of discrimination based on their race or ethnicity during the 2021–2022 school year compared to 19% of White principals. The survey results showed that 40% of Black principals were held to different standards and expectations because of their race over 5% of White principals. The amount that principals have experienced micro-aggressions at their school due to

race was 31% people of color, 36% Black, and 30% Hispanic or Latinx to 11% White principals (Steiner et al., 2022). While this data demonstrates systemic and structural changes that are needed so that principals of color do not have to endure micro-aggressions, it also solidifies the importance of the whole principal as one who is self-aware and educated with the skills needed to understand and lead diverse populations of staff, students, and families.

Principals of color are generally more likely to lead schools in urban locations and schools in which 75% or more of the student population is experiencing poverty (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). In January 2022, 48% of principals of color indicated that they had experienced at least one incident of racial discrimination within the 2021-2022 school year. Seventy percent of principals who experienced racial discrimination indicated that parents and family members of students were the source. Of the principals who reported experiencing racial discrimination, 35% reported symptoms of depression. These results are in comparison to 25% of teacher and principal peers who have not experienced any racial discrimination. These factors directly add to job-related stress and burn-out of school-based principals. In fact, 78% of female principals were more likely to report experiencing frequent job-related stress than male principals and 61% of females reported burn-out in comparison to 54% of their male counterparts. This difference might occur because of outside factors, such as taking care of their own children, but the researchers did not ask about any of those influences. Overall, mental health can be maintained through healthy self-care practices that are culturally relevant for the individual principal.

## **Self-Care Practices of Principals**

### **Personal Self-Care Practices**

Over the years, many attempts to improve schools have occurred which put more demands on principals and can make the job more stressful. With elevated levels of stress, principals become less capable of identifying their own points of overload, whether it be physical, cognitive, or emotional (Ray et al., 2020).

Self-care is a term that individuals use to improve their physical and mental health. For this study, Lee and Miller's (2013) personal self-care is used as the working definition as it includes sleep, nutrition, exercise, meditation and mindfulness, and hydration. Building leaders, such as principals, hold extremely complex and high-pressure positions; therefore, they often neglect their basic needs due to the high pressure of the position and the constant act of putting others first. A study of self-care practices of principals in Arkansas found that overall school leaders work longer hours, are more sleep deprived, more dehydrated, have poorer diet practices, exercise less regularly, and spend less time with their friends and family than the general population (Ray et al., 2020). The Ray et al. (2020) study included 293 principals, 171 assistant principals, and 9 deans of students. Of the participants, 214 male principals and 259 female principals participated. Forty-four percent of respondents knew very little to nothing about their role in promoting personal self-care (Ray et al., 2020). Perhaps this finding is why principals are stressed out and leaving the profession because they do not have the knowledge base to implement basic self-care practices that are tailored to their daily needs. Hayes and Mahfouz (2020) found that when principals take the time to embrace and participate in self-care practices, such as physical, social, and leisure activities, then they can reduce stress. The principal often fails to engage themselves in the spiritual, psychological, and emotional parts of self-care that

have emerged as very important. As Lee and Miller's (2013) self-care framework is clear on the personal and professional needs for self-care, the study by Hayes and Mahfouz (2020) showed that a clear correlation exists between workload and time management and the amount of physical and social care in which the principal engages.

### ***Physical: The Importance of Sleep***

The CDC (2024) recommends that the average adult receive seven to eight hours of good-quality sleep per night. Good quality means that the adult is able to sleep for the majority of the time without waking. A separate study pointed to the possible tie between sleep deprivation and obesity by showing that sleep loss was associated with significantly higher caloric intake and food consumption among healthy men (Brondel et al., 2010). A correlation seems to exist between a higher likelihood for someone who is sleep-deprived to prefer high-calorie foods over healthy options (Nedeltcheva et al., 2009). The effects of sleep deprivation on cognitive performance are significant and numerous, including decreases in motor response times, decreased effectiveness in attention performance, a decline in short-term and working memory, and decreased acquisition and learning, among others (Goel et al., 2009). Goel et al. (2009) listed changing information, updating strategies based on new information, lateral thinking, innovation, risk assessment, maintaining interest in outcomes, mood-appropriate behavior, insight, communication, and temporal memory skills as abilities and skills specifically diminished by sleep deprivation. This problem becomes more intense as decision-making becomes more complex and requires multitasking and divergent thinking. In addition, cognitive function begins to be adversely affected after only four consecutive nights of less than seven hours of sleep (Goel et al., 2009). School-based principals make multiple decisions daily that impact not only student achievement but also student safety. Principals need to keep in mind this

powerful information to ensure a full understanding and the effects that lack of sleep can have on their decision-making for the school community that they serve. A study conducted in Arkansas reported that 79% of principals had difficulty falling asleep during the work week, and 42% of principals experienced difficulty sleeping three to five nights per week (Ray et al., 2020). When asked about uninterrupted sleep, 4.5% of principals responded that they do not wake up during the work week whereas 74% of principals responded with wakefulness and stated this happens three or more nights per week. Forty-five percent of principals reported waking up at least once per night (Ray et al., 2020).

### ***Physical: The Importance of Exercise***

Three basic categories of exercise exist. They are broken down into aerobics, such as running or walking, muscular, which can be weight training, and flexibility, which can be similar to a type of yoga (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2018). The most frequently studied type of exercise is aerobic exercise. The 2008 physical activity guidelines recommend muscle-strengthening activities at least twice weekly, with either moderate-intensity aerobic physical activity for at least 150 minutes per week, vigorous-intensity aerobic physical activity for at least 75 minutes per week, or an equivalent combination. The 2010-2015 National Health Interview Survey for all 50 states and the District of Columbia created the percentage estimated based on pooled data (Blackwell & Clarke, 2018). A recent CDC study found that only 23% of Americans are getting the government-recommended amount of exercise (Blackwell & Clarke, 2018). Aerobic exercise has a profound impact on the executive functions of the human brain, including increased executive function (Hötting & Röder, 2013; Voelcker-Rehage et al., 2011), attention (Hawkins et al., 1992), memory (Stroth et al., 2009), and speed of processing (Moul et al., 1995). Moreover, regular exercise reduces reports of both anxiety and depression (Brosse et

al., 2002). As stated above, nationally, about 23% of U.S. adults aged 18-64 met the guidelines for both aerobic and muscle-strengthening activities from 2010-2015 (Blackwell & Clarke, 2018). The Department of Health and Human Services (2016) recommends at least 150 minutes of moderate cardiovascular exercise. According to Ray et al. (2020), 54% of principals are spending two days a week doing 30 minutes or less of cardiovascular exercise and 46% of principals reported exercising three days per week or more. Only 16% of principals reported meeting the recommendations of 150 cardiovascular minutes (Ray et al., 2020).

### ***Importance of Nutrition***

Most Americans do not fare well on the Healthy Eating Index (HEI), as the diet score is 59 out of 100 for Americans. The HEI measures how closely a diet aligns with the Dietary Guidelines, which include cultural, financial, and personal preferences (CDC, 2023).

Our brain plays a large role in our mental health and physical health; therefore, one must make good choices regarding nutrition. A healthy diet will help with the retention of new knowledge and memory, and one may be able to stabilize their mood with ease. A healthy diet can help with cognitive function, concentration, and the ability to apply new learning (Appleton, 2018). On the contrary, an unhealthy diet can cause problems with new learning, concentration, and memory. The gut-brain axis is the connection when the gut sends signals to the brain and stress hormones are released, which causes inflammation in parts of the brain (Appleton, 2018). According to a study conducted in Arkansas, 87% of principals admitted to missing lunch at least once a week, 40% of principals responded that they miss lunch at least three or more times per week, 30% reported eating at least six meals prepared away from home, 41% of respondents stated that they have four or five meals prepared away from home, and 30% responded that they eat less than three meals away from home (Ray et al., 2020). Of the Arkansas principals who



responded, they were 11 times more likely to be over the ideal weight than at their ideal weight (Ray et al., 2020). Beyond how they eat, principals need to understand how consuming nutritiously rich foods has an impact on the body as a whole to help reduce the stress levels that they endure daily.

### ***Psychological and Emotional***

The personal stressors of school-based principals often lead to feelings of exhaustion, frustration, unhappiness, and numerous physical symptoms, such as headaches, abnormal food cravings, and body ailments (Sorenson, 2007). Building-level principals who are able to implement intentional, personal change to fight high personal stressors become engaged in the process of renewal (Boyatzis & McKee, 2006)

When one thinks of the renewal process, one must consider Lee and Miller's (2013) personal self-care practices, which can consist of physical, psychological, and emotional practices. Some personal self-care practices may lean more towards social or leisure practices depending on the needs of the principal. Everyone has a personal self-care renewal process that is unique to their own needs. Individuals must develop practices that match their needs and change them as often as their needs must be met.

The medical industry stresses that chronic stress may also lead to elevated blood pressure, problems with sleep, anxiety, headaches or backaches, or a state of continued hyperarousal (Kabat-Zinn, 2009). Mahfouz and Richardson (2021) argue that the social-emotional well-being of principals has not been prioritized in years past. This argument supports the need for formal professional development that is sustainable for the individual principal's social-emotional well-being (Hayes et al., 2022).

### ***Social, Leisure, and Spiritual***

Personal self-care for the principal looks beyond the school building. The principal must have a social circle upon which they can depend. Leisure is typically somewhat relaxing; leisure may include spending time with family and friends, reading, or playing a fun sport. Ray et al. (2020) reported that 80% of principals in Arkansas had three hours or less to give to the most important relationships in their lives. Furthermore, 20% of the principals reported spending less than one hour with their loved ones. Half of the participants in the study reported only belonging to one group outside of work, which could be church, social, or extracurricular (Ray et al., 2020). Spirituality is connected to faith, prayer, peace, and fostering a time for reflection and or meditation. Research on experienced, mindful meditators found that those who meditate are more able to suppress automatic responses (Moore & Malinowski, 2009). Among both experienced and novice meditators, a single meditation session could lower the effects of physiological sources of anger (Fennell et al., 2016). Many schools have teachers who have implemented mindfulness practices in schools and have experienced significant changes for both themselves and their students (Ray et al., 2020).

### **Professional Self-Care Practices**

#### ***Workload, Time Management, and Attention to Professional Role***

Workload and time management relate to the employee having mindful management of work tasks and time spent accomplishing work tasks. They will structure the work to meet both the teachers' and students' needs, which could include reorganizing schedules to prioritize working hours so tasks can be completed. Professional self-care consists of advocating for when you are overworked or about to reach burn-out (Wilson, 2023). Lee and Miller (2013) gave examples such as after working with teachers, principals will take a two-minute break. Other

than taking small breaks throughout the day, an example is limiting the amount of work-related discussions that happen when not at work or not engaging in work-related conversations after a set time.

Attention to professional roles could appear as putting structures in place that align with the practitioner's job description. This alignment may also allow for a sense of value for the employee since their work is connected to the goals. The principal needs to recognize that they are the authority figure in their life and they can make their role work for them and their individual needs. When working with a team, recognizing that each individual adds a unique value to the team and initiating meetings with proper introductions will allow for all members to be welcome in a safe space (Lee & Miller, 2013)

### ***Revitalization and Generalization of Energy and Attention to Reactions at Work***

Revitalization and generalization of energy may include seeking out innovative approaches to address work-related challenges, revisiting positive outcomes from past experiences, engaging in community work events, and creating a pleasant working environment. Being able to identify and attend to individual self-care practices both professionally and personally will likely aid in maximizing professional growth and promoting overall well-being (Posluns & Gall, 2020).

Attention to reactions at work means being able to notice and honor their reactions at work. Self-awareness is key with this step; therefore, activities to assist in the management of attention to reactions could include mindfulness activities, implementation strategies from personal therapy, journaling, and debriefing with colleagues. Emotions, all ranges of emotions from happiness to anxiety, are natural and being able to discuss the emotions openly with colleagues helps all group members feel a sense of connectedness (Bartanen et al., 2019).

### ***Professional Social Support, Self-Advocacy, and Professional Development***

Researchers document professional social support and self-advocacy as well as encouragement, constructive feedback, or education from peers (Miller et al., 2019). For this framework, Lee and Miller (2013) extend the capacity of this part of professional self-care to include scheduling regular meetings to problem-solve and developing networks for education, training, and community events. Self-advocacy considers how the practitioner identifies, researches, and advocates for change. When one has the collaboration to work through problems or adversities with others, a sense of community exists instead of having to cope alone, allowing for increased communication and problem-solving within the team (Bartanen et al., 2019).

Professional development is the knowledge of self in professional roles. The well-being is contingent upon the knowledge of how one uses oneself in the professional workplace. Two types of professional development exist, formal and informal. Formal professional development could include joining a professional organization, whereas informal may include learning from a colleague.

### **Self-Care in Other Professions**

Research suggests that there are parallel findings between the medical field and education field as it pertains to the well-being of nurses and physicians. After working with medical professionals, Mills et al. (2017) identified three categories in which the participants practiced self-care; they are physical self-care, social self-care, and inner self-care. Examples of physical self-care were yoga, jogging, and hydrotherapy. Examples of social self-care were family, friends, and colleagues. The final category is inner self-care and examples of this category are psychological, meditation, and spiritual. A survey was administered to medical professionals where there were 372 respondents. Two thirds of the respondents were nurses and one third were

physicians. Only 11% of the respondents reported using only one domain of self-care and 89% of the respondents reported using two or three domains as a self-care strategy (Mills et al., 2017).

Shanafelet (2021) categorized physician wellness into three different categories, The Era of Distress, Wellness 1.0, and Wellness 2.0. Shanafelet (2021) identified the different decades and how demographics affect the work-life balance. For example, during The Era of Distress, there were more male physicians that were in relationships where the other partner kept the house together (Shanafelet, 2021). As the years progressed into Wellness 1.0, the demographics of physicians shifted to more females becoming physicians. More physicians also reported being in relationships where both partners work and share household responsibilities (Shanafelet, 2021). Moving into the future, or Wellness 2.0, the medical profession is focusing on leaders, Chief Wellness Officers, infrastructures, and resources that are able to drive change. These similarities between the medical and education professions could benefit one another especially when looking at the overall wellbeing of the human and organizational leadership to grow positive outputs..

### **Impact Leadership Has on Others**

National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) President Gregg Wiczorek stated, “Recruiting and retaining school leaders will become even more difficult if more is not done to support educators in our schools” (2021, p.1). The school leader is the most important when it comes to supporting the teacher and second only to the teacher in raising student achievement (Grissom et al., 2021). Having healthy and effective school leaders is essential for positive student outcomes (Ni et al., 2018). The impact of principal turnover is significant on the entire school community, especially student achievement. Bartanen et al. (2019) stated that principal turnover lowers the school's academic achievement by 0.03% for the

next school year. Principal turnover also increases teacher turnover, which does not explain the decrease in student achievement. Bartanen et al. (2019) also explain that an experienced principal can greatly offset any negative principal turnover effects. An experienced principal may have personal and professional self-care practices in place to offset any decrease in student achievement if principal turnover occurs.

### **Conclusion**

The whole principal encompasses academic credentials, knowledge, and the ability to regulate one's own self-care needs. Over the past few years, the principalship has changed drastically causing stress to manifest in different ways for each school-based principal. What has not changed is the importance of the principal and ensuring that each student has a well-trained principal leading them each day. Being a well-trained principal not only means possessing academic credentials but also being equipped with the knowledge of how to ensure their own health, both mental and physical. This health prioritization is important not only for the principal but for the overall health of the entire school community.

## **CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY**

This qualitative study explored the self-care practices of principals leading in Title 1 schools in one school district within North Carolina. This study explored three questions:

- What are the personal self-care attitudes, beliefs, and practices of principals leading in Title 1 schools in one North Carolina school district?
- What are the professional self-care attitudes, beliefs, and practices of principals leading in Title 1 schools in one North Carolina school district?
- What, if any, differences exist in self-care attitudes, beliefs, and practices among principals of different races in Title 1 schools in one North Carolina school district?

### **Positionality**

I started my education journey in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania at Duquesne University, as a dual major in elementary education and special education. I was also working at a fitness center in downtown Pittsburgh where I found my passion for helping others meet their health and fitness goals. The owner of the athletic club asked me if I would want to be trained as a personal trainer. Knowing that I could not do everything, I knew that I liked health and fitness; therefore, I reached out to the university and made the tough decision to drop special education from my course of study. From there, I continued with elementary education and studied to become a personal trainer. I tested for the personal training certification in New York City and I maintained a client roster there while I pursued my bachelor's degree in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. My clients ranged from the same age as I was (19 years old) to 70-plus years old. Clients' needs ranged from various health conditions to just wanting to understand nutrition and the impact that it had on their daily lives. Several years later, I moved to North Carolina to pursue my teaching career in middle school science.

Personally, I have suffered migraine headaches since the fifth grade; therefore, finding a trustworthy neurologist was and still is very important to me once I moved to North Carolina. A few years ago, I had an abnormal migraine, which led me to my doctor, then to the hospital, and onto several magnetic resonance imaging and computerized tomography, and ultimately a new understanding of the human brain. After several tests and more doctors, the cause of my migraine was identified as a lesion on my brain, my left hippocampus to be exact. This part of the brain is important for new learning. I asked my neurologist what I could do to make this lesion heal. He said that he could not make any promises, but he did make three suggestions: eat healthy, sleep, and exercise. I was determined to make this lesion disappear. Eventually, the lesion healed but left my right hand and foot permanently numb. My migraine headaches went back to normal. I was able to walk normally, and the numbness on the right side of my body almost went back to normal (except for my hand and foot). I will never forget that final scan when my neurologist turned and looked at me with excitement. As an administrator for a school, I see the effects that nutrition, sleep, and exercise can have on the human body, both positively and negatively. I can only serve others in a school community if I am taking care of myself and modeling positive behaviors, both personally and professionally.

This experience will have an impact on this study in that I am able to make a clear connection between physical health and mental health while many may view them as separate. Having this experience, participants may feel at ease speaking to me about different health concerns that they may be handling, knowing that I have had my own struggles in the past. Some of these health struggles consist of having regular migraine headaches to having an abnormal brain scan, which led to the experts thinking I had either a stroke or Multiple Sclerosis. Tests concluded that I had a lesion on my brain which I still needed to heal from and left my right side



permanently numb. When I speak with coworkers, I am listening to their professional self-care practices to see if ways exist that I can help offer suggestions to implement for them into their daily routine to ease some stressful situations. One bias that I may have is when I hear of others not going to their medical appointments. After having my medical experience, I am more aware of reasons why people may not go to their appointments. After researching the literature for this study, I am even more understanding as to why others may not go to their physician and how important it is to get everyone connected to the appropriate healthcare provider. My voice, experience, and study are here to help others live their life in the healthiest and happiest way possible.

## **Research Design**

### **Qualitative Research**

Qualitative research is the practice of transforming interpretive practices to make the world visible. Qualitative researchers study things in their natural setting in order to make sense or meaning of them. Some of the ways in which researchers do this is through interviews, observations with fieldnotes, and conversations (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p.3). The qualitative approach informs the researcher by allowing the researcher to observe the world, and in this case, the principals who participated in the study. In this study, I collected qualitative data through interviews and a survey. Qualitative research is the best approach because it allows the participants to tell their stories related to the questions asked in the interview (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

### **Descriptive Research**

For this study, I used descriptive qualitative research because it allows the researcher to focus on the participants' real-life experiences and then analyze the stories that the participants

told (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Part of the analysis involves identifying specific themes. Participants may have viewed the topic of this research study as personal, so I sought to make the participants feel comfortable in order to elaborate and give full, well-thought-out truthful answers. Therefore, conducting interviews in a natural, familiar environment was of utmost importance (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Once all interviews were concluded, I analyzed the data by constructing themes about the participants' experiences with self-care (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

### **Site Selection and Participants**

For this study, I selected a public school system in North Carolina. There are almost 200 schools in this district and just over 60 of them are Title 1, which makes this an ideal setting for this study. Title 1 is a federally funded educational program that supports low-wealth students. I sent an email invitation to all Title 1 principals in the selected school system in North Carolina to participate in a Qualtrics survey. I hoped that all Title I principals would participate in this part of the study as this would provide a big-picture overview of the current self-care practice of the principals in these schools. Ultimately, 25 of 63 Title 1 principals participated in the survey. The interview selection pool was open to a diverse sample of principals. In the survey, principals indicated their willingness to participate in an interview, and the first nine participants were selected from the total 11 who agreed to participate in the interview portion of the study. I reached saturation after I interviewed nine participants. Other criteria that I sought to create variation among selected participants included race, gender, building level that the principals serve, and years of experience.

## **Instrumentation**

In this study, I used a survey (see Appendix A). I designed the Qualtrics survey to gather data from principals on the personal and professional self-care practices that are directly aligned with the theoretical framework and research questions used for this study. I sent the Qualtrics survey to all Title 1 principals to get a better understanding of quantifiable questions. The survey allowed me to analyze the personal and professional self-care practices of principals in Title 1 schools in one school district in North Carolina. A total of 29 questions were on the Qualtrics survey. I framed the questions around Lee and Miller's (2013) self-care framework. The survey included 13 personal self-care questions and 10 professional self-care questions. The topics that are covered in the questions directly align with the self-care framework, including the five domains of personal self-care practices and the six domains of professional self-care practices. The last set of five questions gathered demographic information about the participants. To assist with the reliability and validity of the survey instrument, a panel of experts who have knowledge of survey design and educational leadership reviewed the survey questions. The panel of experts consisted of both university and school district-level experts.

I also used interviews in this study. The interview protocol (see Appendix B) allowed the principals to tell their stories and allowed me to gain insight into the lives of the participants. The goal was to have the interviewee elaborate on their personal and professional self-care practices as designed in the interview protocol. I designed questions using Lee and Miller's (2013) self-care framework for social workers and they are different from the questions that were previously posed in the Qualtrics survey. The interview includes 13 personal self-care questions and 10 professional self-care questions. To enhance the credibility of the interview protocol, a panel of experts who have knowledge of qualitative research and educational leadership reviewed the

interview questions. The panel consisted of qualitative researchers from the university and the district level.

### **Data Collection**

Before data collection took place, I secured IRB approval and district approval. Data collection started in February of 2024 and was completed at the end of February for both the survey and the interviews. I sent an email to all Title 1 school principals in the selected school system in North Carolina and invited them to participate in a Qualtrics survey. The principals answered questions to the survey with a yes or a no, or a numerical response. The participants had two weeks to complete the survey. Within the two weeks, I sent three reminder notifications to complete the survey with the link attached. Once the participants completed the survey, I sent a thank you email to them for their participation in the survey. The participants for the interview were selected through purposeful sampling as described above. Within the Qualtrics survey, I invited all principals to participate in the next portion of this study, which consisted of a 30-45-minute interview that was conducted and audio-recorded through Zoom technology. Survey participants' responses to this question generated a list of interested principals for the interview. Once I had selected interview participants and the interviewee confirmed their participation in the interview portion of the study, I solidified meeting dates for the virtual interview. Each interview was allotted up to 60 minutes. Creswell and Poth (2016) maintain the best way to collect the data from participants is in a natural setting. Therefore, I interviewed each principal at their own school, in their own office, or in a space of their choice. Before starting the interview session, all participants were read a pre-written script that stated the purpose of the interview and how I would protect their identity and confidentiality throughout the study. I read each interview question aloud to the participants after they answered the previous question. I compared the

interview data through the use of audio recording embedded in Zoom technology. I took additional handwritten notes during the interviews. I kept all of the data, including transcriptions, on a password-protected computer.

**Data Analysis**

For the analysis of survey data, I used descriptive statistics. I collected the data to quantify the percentage of agreeance and the frequency of engagement in different self-care practices. I used this data to provide a broad context within which interview participants’ stories were told.

For data analysis of interview transcripts, I used deductive and inductive coding. I also used Dedoose to assist with the analysis of the qualitative dat

**Table 3.1**

*Research Questions*

Research Question	Data Source	Data Analysis
What are personal self-care practices of principals in low-wealth schools?	Interview Questions 6-11	InVivo Coding
	Survey Questions 1-13	Deductive Coding
What are professional self-care practices of principals in low-wealth schools?	Interview Questions 12-21	InVivo Coding
	Survey Questions 14-23	Deductive Coding
What, if any, differences exist in self-care practice among principals of different races in low-wealth schools?	Interview Questions 1-21	InVivo Coding
	Survey Questions 1-28	Deductive Coding

For inductive coding, I used in-vivo coding. Qualitative researchers typically use in-vivo coding and this type of coding will summarize the participants' answers to the interview questions by using participants' words. I identified themes that emerged from the participants by using the literal words of the interviewee in both the survey and the interview. By using in-vivo coding, I identified phrases from the participants' transcripts that are important to the study. In addition, I used deductive coding and generated codes from the theoretical framework (Saldaña, 2020, p. 40). The deductive codes for personal self-care were: relationships, spirituality, exercise, nutrition, sleep, and stress. The deductive codes for professional self-care were: professional development, collaboration, mentor/daily outreach, committee members, organizations, time on task, awareness, and strategic plan.

During the first pass of coding, I read and examined the interview transcript to identify phrases that the participants had already said that are aligned with the deductive codes. I used in-vivo coding to identify those phrases that emerged as important that were not directly aligned with the theoretical framework. During the second pass of coding, I identified patterns and themes that directly aligned with the theoretical framework and the research questions. The third cycle of coding is when I started into the report-writing process, which included identifying themes based on the previous two cycles of coding.

### **Trustworthiness or Credibility**

I used the same interview protocol with all participating principals from all levels and different school sites (Yin, 2018). Furthermore, I invited the participants to member check their information which adds to the credibility of the study.

### **Limitations and Delimitations**

A limitation of this study is whether or not the participants responded to the questions honestly during the interview. Another limitation is that the participants may not have been aware of the amount of stress that they were under. A delimitation of the study is that I made a choice to study Title 1 schools in one school district in North Carolina. Another delimitation is the participants I chose to participate in the interview portion of the study.

### **Conclusion**

The descriptive qualitative research approach was the best approach for this research study as it allowed the participants to share their individual stories about their own self-care practices. The descriptive research approach allowed me to understand the life experiences of the participants and identify themes in current self-care practices.

## **CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS**

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive study is to explore the self-care practices of principals leading in Title 1 schools within one North Carolina school district. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, I gained insights into the personal and professional self-care practices of principals leading Title 1 schools in one North Carolina school district as well as how principals' race shaped their experience with self-care. I selected a large public school system located in North Carolina. There are almost 200 schools in this district and more than 60 of those schools are Title 1 schools. I invited all Title I principals in the district to participate in a survey. Ultimately, 26 principals completed the survey. As a part of the survey, principals had the opportunity to indicate their willingness to participate in an interview. A total of nine principals participated in individual interviews. I coded the data and developed themes. In this chapter, I describe the participants and the themes I generated through data collection with principals. Finally, I present a summary of the findings.

### **Participant Profiles**

For the survey portion of the study, 25 principals from Title 1 schools participated. The interview portion of the study involved nine of the 25 initial participants who volunteered for the follow up interview. To protect the interview participants' real identities, I have replaced their names with pseudonyms and described them below (see Table 4.1).

#### **Mr. Clark**

Mr. Clark is a white male and an early career principal. He has a middle school teaching background and previously taught in Title 1 schools in North Carolina in the same district where he now serves as a principal. He is currently serving in his third year as the principal of a multi-



track year-round elementary school. He believes that self-care means “placing a priority on intentional efforts to enjoy, to do things you enjoy.”

**Ms. Harris**

Ms. Harris is a mid-career principal and is a Black female. She is serving in her second district in North Carolina as a principal. She has served as a principal in elementary and middle schools, both Title 1 in North Carolina. She has been a middle school mathematics teacher and is currently serving as a middle school principal. Overall, she has been a principal for 11 years. She believes that self-care means “the ability to take care of my needs, making sure that I take care of me so that I’m able to take care of other people.”

**Ms. Young**

Ms. Young is advanced in her career. She is a Black female who has served in the same district for her entire career. She was a part of the Principals Fellows Program. She has been a principal for 22 years and is a native of North Carolina; both of her parents were educators. Of the 22 years in which she has served as a principal, 18 years were in a Title 1 school in North Carolina. Ms. Young explains her beliefs about self-care: “I believe that the greatest self-care is setting boundaries. The biggest boundary for me in a job like a principal is protecting time for myself to take care of and address my own needs.”

**Mr. Jones**

Mr. Jones is beginning his career as a first-year principal. He is a Black male. He served in several school districts in North Carolina as an elementary school teacher before entering administration. He has been an assistant principal in several Title 1 schools in one school district in North Carolina. He believes that self-care means taking care of your whole self so that you can

operate effectively. “Taking care of the mind, body, and soul” is his definition of what the whole self means to him.

**Ms. Miller**

Ms. Miller is advanced in her career as a principal. She is a White female. She has served at both elementary and middle levels as an administrator for about 20 years. This is her 31st year in education and she has served six years in her current middle school position. She believes that self-care is having a good life-work balance and making sure “your cup is full, because if your cup is not full, you can't pour into others.”

**Ms. Barnes**

Ms. Barnes is a mid-career principal. She is a White female who identifies as an “Educator because it is holistic.” This year is her 12th serving as a principal. Self-care means paying attention, being in tune with how she is doing, and staying in her zone that keeps her healthy. Early in her career, she learned how stress can have physical implications; therefore, she is mindful of her self-care for her mental and physical self.

**Ms. Woods**

Ms. Woods is beginning her career as a principal. She is a Black female. She has been an educator in several states and served in different leadership capacities before becoming a principal of a middle school. She believes that the COVID-19 pandemic was a game-changer in her life. She used running to overcome the emotional and physical stress of the time and has found a new way of life.

**Ms. Foster**

Ms. Foster is advanced in her career as a principal. She is a Black female. She has served in one district her entire career. She began her career as a teacher assistant and bus monitor and

is now the principal of a school serving students with behavior and emotional difficulties. She believes that self-care means doing what needs to be done to make sure that she is at optimal performance.

**Mr. Henry**

Mr. Henry is a mid-career principal and is a Black male. He has led schools in two different states. He is currently leading his third school, which is an elementary school. He believes that self-care is “living a happy life, just living a purposeful life and making sure that you are healthy and feel good.”

**Table 4.1**

***Summary of Participants Characteristics***

	School Level	Years of Experience	Race	Gender
Mr. Clark	ES	3 years	White	Male
Ms. Harris	MS	11 years	Black	Female
Ms. Young	ES	22 years	Black	Female
Mr. Jones	ES	1 year	Black	Male
Ms. Miller	MS	20 years	White	Female
Ms. Barnes	MS	10 years	White	Female
Ms. Woods	MS	1 year	Black	Female
Ms. Foster	MS	17 years	Black	Female
Ms. Henry	ES	10 years	Black	Male

**Table 4.2**  
*Summary of Survey Participants' Characteristics*

Characteristic	Percent of Participants	Number of Participants
<b>Gender</b>		
Female	64%	16
Male	28%	7
Decline to Respond	8%	2
<b>Race</b>		
Black	52%	13
White	32%	8
Hispanic	4%	1
American Indian	4%	1
Declined to respond	8%	2
<b>Years as Principal</b>		
1-5 years	36%	9
6-10 years	16%	4
11-15 years	36%	9
> 16 years	8%	2
Declined to respond	4%	1
<b>Building Level</b>		
ES	48%	12
MS	32%	8
HS	8%	2
Declined to Answer	12%	3

### **Findings**

I organized the findings of this study into three sections, which directly align with the three research questions (see Table 4.2). I emailed principals serving in Title 1 schools in one school district in North Carolina a Qualtrics survey where they were given the opportunity to participate in answering questions with yes, no, or numerical answers. In the same survey, participants were also able to volunteer for the interview portion of the study. I purposefully selected the participants to participate in an interview by opting in to be included during the survey portion of the data collection process. The three themes related to personal self-care are:

(1) Exercise, nutrition, and sleep are a priority for some principals but not all; (2) Psychological and emotional awareness is a must for all principals; and (3) Principals rely on their spirituality.

Three themes related to professional self-care are: (1) Principals work hard and are intentional about setting limits for self-care; (2) Self-Advocacy is important for some principals but not all; and (3) Principals find the joy and trauma which boosts their energy. The central finding related to how race shapes principals' self-care is (1) Black principals perceive greater risk to their mental health.

**Table 4.3**

*Research Questions and Themes*

Research Question	Themes
RQ1 What are the personal self-care attitudes, beliefs, and practices of principals leading in Title 1 schools in one North Carolina school district?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Exercise, nutrition, and sleep are a priority for some principals but not all</li><li>2. Psychological and emotional awareness is a must for all principals</li><li>3. Principals rely on their spirituality</li></ol>
RQ2 What are the professional self-care attitudes, beliefs, and practices of principals leading in Title 1 schools in one North Carolina school district?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Principals work hard and are intentional about setting limits for self-care</li><li>2. Professional relationships and support are the key to success for some principals</li><li>3. Self-Advocacy is important for some principals but not all</li><li>4. Principals find the joy and trauma which boosts their energy</li></ol>
RQ3 What, if any, differences exist in self-care attitudes, beliefs, and practices among principals of different races in Title 1 schools in one North Carolina school district?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Black principals perceive greater risk to their mental health</li></ol>

**Research Question #1**

This study aimed to find the answer to the first research question, “What are the personal self-care attitudes, beliefs, and practices of principals leading in Title 1 schools in one North Carolina school district?” From this question, I hoped to learn if the principals’ personal self-care practices have an impact on their personal well-being. I identified the following three

themes: (1) Exercise, nutrition, and sleep are a priority for some principals but not all; (2) Psychological and emotional awareness is a must for all principals; and (3) Principals rely on their spirituality.

### ***Exercise, Nutrition, and Sleep Are a Priority for Some Principals but Not All***

Participants began by describing their physical self-care practices and in doing so, it became evident that some principals prioritize exercise, nutrition, and sleep, but not all. Ms. Harris explained, “I commit myself to working out and I go every morning at five o'clock. So, five out of seven mornings a week, I go work out, and I have a committed time.” On the other hand, Ms. Miller stated,

Dealing with Graves disease, a lot of extra health things that I have never dealt with in my 50-plus years have ever dealt with, ever, and exhaustion and being lethargic and all the things. So where I used to exercise daily, that has gone by the wayside. .... But I do take walks on the weekends and do my best as far as that's concerned. But I have fallen off the wagon, if you will, my during-the-week exercise.

Other participants were just beginning to realize the importance of exercise. For example, Mr. Jones, a first-year principal stated, “a new one that's becoming, I would say, becoming a self-care thing for me is going to the gym. I need to be healthy.” The participants’ statements directly correlate with the survey response data that was collected from the principals serving in Title 1 schools. Of the participants who responded to the survey, 52% reported that they exercise 0-2 days per week and 28% reported that they exercise 5 or more times per week (see Table 4.3).

**Table 4.4**

*Principals' Frequency of Exercise*

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Days per week of exercise	Percent of principals
0-2 days per week	52%
3-4 days per week	20%
5-7 days per week	28%

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In addition to exercise, participants recognized the role of nutrition and their physical self-care. Ms. Young prioritized her nutrition. She stated,

When I'm thinking about a typical week, probably the biggest thing that I do is make time to eat lunch because that can be really hard to accomplish. Now, my door is actually open when I eat that lunch. I don't mind if people talk to me. Just understand, I am going to eat my lunch because, I mean, I have to. I am [also] really intentional about drinking water.

Conversely, while he knows it is part of self-care, Mr. Jones does not eat lunch. He explained,

I've been this way for a long time now so it's like in me. As assistant principal, I never ate lunch. As a principal, I don't eat lunch really. But even that is a self-care thing that I think could be taught in a principal preparation program or in other forms like, "Hey, make sure you schedule a time for you to have lunch because that is another way that you take care of yourself."

The survey data indicated that 24% of respondents have the same beliefs as Ms. Young as they never miss a meal. On the other hand, 36% of participants reported missing meals 3-4 times



per week, and similar to Mr. Jones, 24% of participants reported missing meals 5-7 times per week (see Table 4.4). These missed meals are reportedly due to work responsibilities.

**Table 4.5**

*Principals' Frequency of Missed Meals Due to Work*

Days per week of missed meals	Percent of principals
0-2 days per week	36%
3-4 days per week	36%
5-7 days per week	28%

For those who focus on their nutrition, some prioritize the type of food they eat. Ms. Barnes stated, “Knowing stress, for a long time I've been a vegetarian, eating very healthy foods, whole foods, that sort of thing, that education around I'd much rather use natural resources rather than doing something medicinal.”

Interview participants did not discuss sleep as an important part of their physical self-care; however, I did not explicitly ask about sleep in the interviews so it could be that they do value sleep but they were not prompted to discuss it or it is also possible that they may not value sleep as part of their physical self-care. In the survey, 76% of the respondents reported they are averaging 6 or more hours of sleep per night. Of the participants who responded to this question, 56% reported that they wake up 2 to 3 times per night and 12% wake up 4 to 5 times per night (see Table 4.5).

**Table 4.6**

*Principals' Frequency of Waking Up in the Middle of Sleep*

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Times per night	Percent of principals
0-2 times per night	32%
3-4 times per night	56%
5-7 times per night	12%

---

Through the survey data and the participants' interviews, some principals, but not all, have a general understanding or an awareness of the importance that exercise, nutrition, and sleep play in their personal self-care and overall well-being.

***Psychological and Emotional Awareness is a Must for All Principals***

Everyone has a personal self-care renewal process that is unique to their own needs. Through the survey and individual interviews, principals must have psychological and emotional awareness is a must for all principals. Psychological and emotional awareness is the ability to identify and label our emotions which allows us to understand feelings that can often be unpleasant and distressing and to respond to and regulate our emotions more effectively (Weissman, 2021).

Respondents reported that 56% of the respondents agree that work affects their personal relationships. Ms. Barnes stated, "It's hard to find and keep friends when you're so busy." On the contrary, 48% of respondents disagree that work affects their personal lives. Mr. Henry stated, "The only relationships that I think directly affected is the relationships with my wife and my two kids. I try to block out any other type of things that might be negative, even with my surrounding family." Ms. Harris mentioned mentoring another educator and stated, "I have a friend who just had a baby, and that's one of the things I'm coaching her through is family comes first, not the job, not anything else. Family comes first." The survey revealed that 48% of

respondents sacrifice personal relationships for work 0-2 times per week, 32% of respondents sacrifice their personal relationships 3-4 times per week due to work, and 20% sacrifice personal relationships for work 5-7 times per week (see Table 4.6).

**Table 4.7**

*Principals' Frequency of Sacrificing Personal Relationships for Work*

Times per week	Percent of principals
0-2 times per week	48%
3-4 times per week	32%
5-7 times per week	20%

When the participants were asked about leisure activities, 60% of the respondents agreed that they participate in leisure activities and 63% of the respondents reported engaging in leisure activities at least 2 times per week (see Table 4.7). Mr. Clark made a connection between leisure activities and stress when he stated,

We all carry stress around, whether it be work or personal, but when I step onto the golf course or if I step onto the pickleball court because I enjoy those things so much and the people that I'm with generally, especially with golf because it's some of my best friends that I'm playing with, I can generally block out everything else, not to the point where I'm ignoring everything else.

Mr. Jones directly correlates leisure activities with his personal relationships as demonstrated when Mr. Jones explained,

I have a four-year-old and a two-year-old, so all of my leisure activities are at the park or the things that kind of revolve around them, but I enjoy playing with them so for me it

fills my bucket to see them happy and then see them have joy and just to be playing with them and to be able to play with them and be active with them. That's the main leisure activity, also spend time with my wife.

**Table 4.8**

*Principals' Frequency of Leisure Activities*

Times per week	Percent of principals
0-2 times per week	63%
3-4 times per week	33%
5-7 times per week	4%

I also asked participants to reflect on their stressors and triggers. In the survey, 40% of respondents strongly agreed that they are aware of their triggers and stressors. Mr. Clark shared his strategy for addressing his triggers and stress: “I started going to therapy and went through a separation and a divorce. It just put more things in perspective on quality of life and your why and everything, and so that carried over into work.” In addition to the 40% of respondents who strongly agree that they are aware of their triggers and stressors, 56% agree that they can regulate their behaviors and 32% strongly agree that they can regulate their own behaviors. As an example of self-regulation, Mr. Jones has implemented Community Resilience Model Training (CRM) into his daily personal self-practice. Mr. Jones stated,

Self-care for me has evolved into much of what CRM says, is trying to keep myself, maintain myself in composure, in my resiliency zone to be rationally thinking.

Sometimes you can be bumped high or bumped low, and when I'm bumped out of my

resiliency zone, that's when I need to do something to take care of myself to get me back in a good space.

Mr. Clark explained his strategy for reducing stress, which is based on a daily ritual for starting his morning in a way that is not rushed. He described,

I make sure that I have time to read and have coffee, eat a good breakfast, and that I'm not rushing because I really feel like having to rush in the morning sets up my day slash in general for people's days, it sets it up for more stress, and there's already enough stress that's going to come from a day, and I don't need to start it that way.

Ms. Young explained her greatest self-care as she stated,

The greatest self-care is setting boundaries. And so, I think if you set boundaries, that applies to everything else because, to me, the biggest boundary for me in a job like principal is protecting time for myself to take care of and address my own needs. That need varies from day to day. Right? I mean, it may be needing a quiet time or a breather or may mean getting my nails done.

Survey data show that 52% of respondents agree that their stress impacts others, while 16% strongly agree that their stress impacts others. Ms. Barnes stated,

I needed to be mindful how I stay calm, even in situations where things would start racing. So, I've always been mindful, and with that then I have educated others and being careful because I do work in a... educators are, a lot of them are women, and so trying to help them see how we need to be careful and how we care for each other and ourselves and how we come to our jobs, ensuring that our health is so important.

Ms. Woods mentioned how she models what to do in stressful situations and how others need her advice. She stated,

I also speak it out so that they can see also hopefully how to implement some of those practices for themselves. It's funny to see the little girls, "Breathe, Ms. Woods, Breathe." I can hear them coaching me along. I acknowledge it, and I smile, and I'm like, "That's right. So I want you to practice it as well."

Ms. Young learned about how her leadership impacts the emotional health of everyone around her. She stated,

That is really important in the principalship. As a new principal, I didn't recognize that, because I thought, "You're the principal. You're supposed to be the expert. Can't show any signs of weakness or vulnerability," and versus, over the experience, learning that transparency is really the way that you cultivate trust. And so, by learning some of the practices of being an effective leader who cultivates trust in your environment, then that contributes to the emotional health of everybody around you as well as you as the leader.

While they each have their own way for addressing their stress and triggers, the principals in this study had an awareness of their psychological and emotional health and had self-care strategies in place to promote their psychological and emotional well-being.

### ***Principals Rely on Their Spirituality***

Reflection and meditation are a very important part of self-care to Title I principals in this school district in North Carolina. According to the survey data, 44% of respondents strongly agree and 40% of respondents agree that they have spiritual practices in place to assist in their personal self-care practices. Mr. Henry stated,

I'm still going to go into beliefs, and my religion, and my faith. I think that's very important. An example, my word of the year is supposed to be word of the year. It turned into words of the year. And, my words of the year: confident, peace.

Ms. Harris uses the church as a part of her self-care as demonstrated in this statement:

Sundays, I do church. Sunday is my day where, unless it is an emergency for work, I don't do anything related to work. But church is an important piece of my self-care. And when there have been times when I have not gone regularly, I can feel the stress coming back. So, I really need the church part of that.

Given the survey data that 84% of respondents agree or strongly agree that they engage in personal spiritual self-care, the next question aimed to examine the frequency with which respondents engaged in spiritual self-care. Of those who are engaging in personal spiritual self-care practices, 44% are doing so 4 or more times per week (see Table 4.8). For example, Mr. Jones stated,

I've got the Bible app and I read the Bible every morning and read the daily scripture and kind of meditate on it and think about what those words mean for me, for me as a principal, and I kind of compartmentalize it like, "What does this mean for me as a principal? What does this mean? How can it relate to me as a father, as a husband?"

The majority of the respondents, 56%, engage in personal spiritual practices 0-3 times per week. Ms. Barnes was clear when she made this statement about her spiritual practices, "If we don't go for a hike on a weekend, then there's something wrong or it just was rainy."

**Table 4.9**

*Principals' Frequency of Spiritual Engagement*

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Times per week	Percent of principals
0-1 times per week	26%
2-3 times per week	30%
4-5 times per week	22%
>6 times per week	22%

---

Participants consider spirituality a high priority for their personal self-care practices. Spirituality has a different meaning to each principal, from a meditative nature walk to reading the Bible. Principals collectively agree that spirituality is a high priority for personal self-care practices for principals.

**Research Question #2**

This study aimed to learn the answer to the second research question, “What are the professional self-care attitudes, beliefs, and practices of principals leading in Title 1 schools in one North Carolina school district?” From this question, I hoped to learn the different ways in which principals perceive and enact professional self-care practices. I identified the following themes: (1) Principals work hard and are intentional about setting limits for self-care; (2) Professional relationships and support are the key to success for some principals; (3) Self-advocacy is important for some principals but not all; and (4) Principals find the joy and trauma, which boosts their energy.



### *Principals Work Hard and Are Intentional About Setting Limits for Self-Care*

The career of a principal comes with many responsibilities, can be very time-consuming, and may take a toll on the overall health and well-being of the individual. In a discussion with Ms. Harris, she spoke about being intentional with her time both professionally and personally. Ms. Harris stated, “you want to get the job done and get the job done well. And so, unless you force yourself to take care of yourself to self-care, principals won't do it. And that's why a lot of them don't.” Survey data revealed that 42% of respondents agree that they take small breaks during the day (see Table 4.9). Ms. Young stated, “Being in a school where you're a leader for adults and children, and everyone's safety is your responsibility, plus their well-being is also your responsibility, it is a very heavy weight to carry.” Mr. Clark stated, “I have to be very intentional about setting up for those vacations, for those breaks.” Mr. Clark brings awareness to the schedule of a school administrator as they are often working year-round.

**Table 4.10**

#### *Principals Take Small Breaks During the Day*

Strength of agreement	Percent of principals
Strongly agree	8%
Agree	42%
Disagree	29%
Strongly disagree	21%

Survey data reported that 54% of respondents agree that they limit the amount of work they discussed outside of work (see Table 4.10). While in a principal meeting where an open discussion started, Ms. Barnes explained,

That was the breaking point when I finally heard, "You've got to stop." We were losing principals, and unfortunately, we literally were losing principals. We had several deaths that happened. And I think that in our face pushed us to start speaking a little bit more. I think even with that loss, we're still not advocates enough to speak to it, because you get celebrated and honored for all the good hard work you do, and we're not getting that honor to take a pause and a stop.

**Table 4.11**

*Principals Limit Work Discussion Outside of Work*

Strength of agreement	Percent of principals
Strongly agree	8%
Agree	54%
Disagree	13%
Strongly disagree	25%

Ms. Woods is a first-year principal and admitted that overall, she does a good job at limiting how much she discusses work. Ms. Woods stated,

Oh, yeah, absolutely, because it's a hard job, right? It's not exactly easy. The number, the volume of emails and questions I get and the things that my brain thinks every day. I told my husband, if I think about it, I may lay on the floor and start screaming at the top of my lungs. It's a lot, right.

Principal participants described that they must be intentional about their professional self-care practices for overall well-being. Having structures in place to assist with setting limits the intentional planning of breaks, and limit work discussion outside of work, so that the focus can stay on leading the school community is helpful.

### *Professional Relationships and Support are the Key to Success for Some*

Principals lean on mentor relationships for professional growth and support as a form of professional self-care. A school leader, Ms. Barnes stated, “I've built a team in the last few years that puts mental health at the beginning of our work and always at the forefront. And so, we're trying to normalize the conversation around mental health.” As a part of the interview process, participants answered whether being a building administrator promotes self-care. Mr. Jones explained,

Being a building administrator in my opinion does not promote self-care practices. I will say that I do think when staff members, and I believe this is true everywhere I've been as an administrator when staff members do see that I've had a rough encounter with a parent or have had a rough day, they know that and they respond and say, "Hey, you probably need to just go take care of yourself." They have sympathy for that. I think that's the only way that the administrator kind of promotes is that then your staff knows, "Hey, that was a lot even for the administrator." So, they are like, "Go take care of yourself," and have a little bit of sympathy.

Survey results report that 58% of respondents agree that they use professional support to develop skill sets (see Table 4.11). Ms. Miller stated, “an administration role looks very different than it did a few years ago, and I hate to keep going back to COVID, but it looks very, very different. It is much more challenging. My day-to-day is much more challenging than it ever has been before.” Ms. Young stated,

I think, honestly, some of the practices of just being an effective leader contribute to my emotional health in that regard. Another one is crucial conversations. I felt like learning crucial conversations was life-changing for me at work and at home, and being able to

frame this mindset of how we create psychological safety in difficult conversations, whether that's with family or with colleagues. So yeah. I think a lot of learning to be a leader is about managing your emotional health and other people's emotional health, as well.

**Table 4.12**

*Principals' Use of Professional Supports to Grow Skill Sets*

Strength of agreement	Percent of principals
Strongly agree	13%
Agree	58%
Disagree	25%
Strongly disagree	4%

Ms. Young stated, “that is what the principal job is like, because you are ultimately responsible for everything that happens. It just can be very heavy. It can be really heavy if you are not intentional about protecting your psychological safety.”

Ms. Harris discussed the difference between leading a Title 1 school compared to a non-Title 1 school. She highlighted the additional challenge of leading a Title I school and stated, “It is the resources, but not in terms of money. It’s human resources. The needs are so great and there are not enough staff to serve all the needs.”

Of the participants who responded to the survey, 46% agree that they seek out regular mentorship (see Table 4.12). When asked about relationships, Ms. Barnes stated,

How do relationships support? They are everything, right? I think we cannot live in isolation, and community is so important to me. I cannot just come in and do a job. This

work is a work of service, and I can't do it alone and have to rely on my community. I am stronger when I have a team with me. I'm stronger when we know each other well and we can care for each other.

When asked about the principal preparation program and how much of that training was about self-care, 100% of the participants interviewed stated that they did not have a class that was directly correlated to self-care practices as a principal. One participant stated that a professor would make statements to take care of yourself and another participant stated that he learned about self-care through the internship process from the mentor principal that he has paired with through the program.

**Table 4.13**

*Principals' Seek Out Professional Mentorship*

Strength of agreement	Percent of principals
Strongly agree	12%
Agree	46%
Disagree	21%
Strongly disagree	21%

Some principals value relationships with mentors and seek to integrate mentorship as a part of their professional self-care.

***Self-Advocacy is Important for Some Principals but Not All***

A part of professional self-care is self-advocacy and having the ability to voice concerns to the appropriate district leaders when necessary. Some principals view self-advocacy as an important part of their professional practice. On the survey, 66% of participants strongly agree or

agree that “I currently advocate for my own needs in the school district” (see Table 4.13). Mr. Young gives specific examples of how he advocates for change in principal working conditions through this statement:

I speak up at principals' meetings where there is district leadership present always. When I say speak up, I mean if I have input related to those types of topics, and if I have ideas, especially, I share them. When given the opportunity to share input, whether through the division or through other surveys, I take them. We had a principal working condition survey last year, so I spent time on that. We all take too many surveys and we feel like they're a pain, and I get that, but if we want things to be different, if we want conditions to be different, we want things to change, that is the method of giving feedback.

In advocating for change and looking at the school system, Mr. Jones stated, “a good addition to the school system right now is that we have wellness coordinators who are licensed clinical therapists that will also come out and support schools and staff members.” Ms. Foster and Ms. Woods also referenced bringing in a licensed clinical therapist to work with their staff.

**Table 4.14**

*Principals' Advocate for Their Own Needs*

Strength of agreement	Percent of principals
Strongly agree	29%
Agree	37%
Disagree	21%
Strongly disagree	13%

Ms. Barnes spoke about having *Help Now* posters around the hallway to remind the staff and the students that they have resources to keep them grounded. Ms. Foster made a connection between leadership and the principal being at peak performance. Ms. Foster stated,

If you're not at your optimal capacity, it will show. Leadership, it's lonely, and you don't have a lot of people around you saying, "Hey, you need to take some time," because they're always dropping those monkeys on your shoulders for you to take care of. So, you're not mindful of what you're doing and not careful to overwhelm yourself, you can easily become frustrated, overwhelmed, and you're not going to be working to your full capacity.

Principals have several ways to advocate for their needs. Self-advocacy, when necessary, with district leaders seems to be impactful and empowering for some principals.

### ***Principals Find the Joy and Trauma Which Boosts Their Energy***

Principals who find joy in their practice, that is directly aligned with their passion, may find a boost in their energy. A survey question asked participants about their passions, and 64% of the respondents strongly agree or agree that they have systems or structures in place that remind them of their passions (see Table 4.14). Ms. Harris and Ms. Woods discuss how they are reminded of their passion throughout the day. Ms. Harris stated, "I've always said what de-stresses me in a building is being able to walk and sit and have the time to actually sit in the classroom." A visual representation from a former student helps Ms. Woods, who stated,

I have artwork from a student who I taught her math. She graduated a semester late. We bumped heads every day. I lost track of her and came across this Jolie on social media. Is this the same Jolie that I taught? She's now an artist, right? A fantastic artist. So, I have a

piece of her artwork to remind myself to always get to know what your kids' passions are and don't look at them as just what you're teaching them, but that kind of thing.

**Table 4.15**

*Principals Have Systems and Structures to Remind Them of Their Passions*

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Strength of agreement	Percent of principals
Strongly agree	29%
Agree	38%
Disagree	25%
Strongly disagree	8%

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Two participants gave gentle reminders as to what may be contributing to more intentional approaches to self-care. For them, traumatic experiences contributed to incorporating personal or professional self-care practice into their daily routines. Ms. Foster stated, “It took the death of some of my other colleagues. One, in particular, died in her office. It's situations or circumstances like that that make you prioritize what's important.” Ms. Harris stated,

I feel like post-COVID, people are starting to take care of themselves more, but it's kind of hard when your mindset has always been, "Go, go, go, go." And now, you're like, "No, no, no." Now, I'm going to make sure I'm taking care of me.

Ms. Harris explained why she feels that principals are starting to take care of themselves and Mr. Jones gave a clear example as to why he feels principals need to ensure revitalization of their energy. Mr. Jones stated,

As principals, it's hard. As assistant principals, it's hard. We lead people. When you're in the airplane and they say if the oxygen fails, make sure you take care of yourself first



before you help other people. A lot of times, we can't pour into cups if we're empty. I look at us as pourers a lot of times, and so we have to take care of ourselves to be able to pour, to have something to pour, so that's why I do think self-care is important for administrators.

After 22 years of being a principal, Ms. Young is intentional about how she starts her day, Ms. Young stated, "I'm a people person. I just get so much joy from being with the children, especially. I mean, probably my greatest self-care structure at school is greeting the children in the morning." Principals who have professional self-care structures in place that appeal to their individualized passion continue to find joy and daily energy for their work.

### **Research Question #3**

#### ***Black Principals Perceive Greater Risk to Their Mental Health***

This study aimed to discover the answer to the third research question, "What, if any, differences exist in self-care attitudes, beliefs, and practices among principals of different races in Title 1 schools in one North Carolina school district?" From this question, I hoped to learn if the principals' race has any impact on their personal or professional self-care. I identified the following theme: Black principals perceive greater risk to their mental health.

The multiple societal issues occurring at the same time as the COVID-19 pandemic affected many people in different ways. Ms. Woods gives her perspective as to why she turned to self-care practices. Ms. Woods stated,

I was telling somebody one time that to be attacked on all fronts is difficult. So, during COVID, you had public education being attacked, you had Black people being attacked. My mother is an immigrant from the Bahamas; immigrants are being attacked. My husband is an immigrant from Africa, and they are being attacked. All those different

attacks let me know that I have to take care of myself. There's no way that I could survive all those attacks if I didn't take care of myself.

Ms. Woods continued to explain how she uses exercise and spirituality as a part of her personal self-care practices to assist with addressing the attacks she previously described. Ms. Woods stated, “Sometimes when I run, it's just my form of praise to say, ‘Oh my God, I made it. Thank you.’ Let me go out here and sing and say, ‘Oh, hallelujah, I can do it again tomorrow,’ kind of deal, right?” Survey data demonstrates that of the participants who responded, 69% of Black principals strongly agree that they have spiritual practices in place but only 25% of White principals and 0% of principals from other racial groups strongly agree that they have spiritual practices in place. In terms of agreeance, 100% of American Indian and Hispanic/Latino principals, 50% of White principals and principals from other racial groups, and 23% of Black principals agree that they have spiritual practices in place.

**Table 4.17**

*Principals’ Agreeance of Spirituality by Race*

Strength of agreement	American Indian	Black	Hispanic/Latino	White	Other
Strongly Agree	0%	69%	0%	25%	0%
Agree	100%	23%	100%	50%	50%
Disagree	0%	8%	0%	25%	0%
Strongly Disagree	0%	0%	0%	0%	50%

Ms. Woods celebrates the joy in her career with this statement, “In my leisure time, I run. Sounds ridiculous, but I do. So when I have a moment, sometimes I run for self-care and sometimes I run because I enjoy it. If I've had a fantastic day, I'm like, ‘Oh my gosh, I want to just go and run.’” Survey data reveals that 38% of Black principals engage in exercise 0-1 days per week whereas 31% of Black principals engage in exercise 5 or more days per week. These

results are somewhat similar to White principals as 25% of White principals engage in exercise 0-1 days per week and 37.5% engage in exercise 5 or more days per week. In contrast, 100% of American Indian and Hispanic/Latino participants engage in exercise 0-1 days per week.

**Table 4.18**

*Percent Engagement in Exercise for by Race*

Strength of agreement	American Indian	Black	Hispanic/Latino	White	Other
0-1 days	100%	38%	100%	25%	0%
2 days	0%	15%	0%	12.5%	50%
3-4 days	0%	16%	0%	25%	0%
5 or more days	0%	31%	0%	37.5%	50%

Ms. Young discussed her view on being a Black woman in the principalship. She discussed managing the stress from racial trauma and other conflicts occurring in schools as it adds to the work and stress of principals. Ms. Young explains,

Being a Black woman, I feel like my mental health is at greater risk, particularly in the principalship. I mean, there are just the challenges of living in the United States, which is a country founded on racism. So, racism is baked into every system that we are part of, and so it really has an impact on us.

Mr. Jones stated what it is like to be a Black man and expressed the stigma surrounding therapy for Black men,

A stigma for Black families in general, specifically Black men, is that Black men have to be strong so going to therapy can be seen as being weak or having problems. Another thing that is common or has been common in Black families, I think it's starting to change, is that what happens here stays here, so a lot of times you don't seek therapy because this is all supposed to stay in the house. I think that those things do have an

impact on breaking that curse or that thought chain of, “Okay, well, this is my mental health and this is what I need to do to sustain being a principal, in order to sustain being a father, in order to sustain being a husband.”

Mr. Jones continued to explain,

The biggest thing is, like I said, breaking that stigma of “it's not okay for a Black male to go to therapy” or “it's not okay for a Black male to cry” or “it's not okay for things like that” because those are outlets that help and help one to feel like they're taking care of their self.

Ms. Barnes reflected on both her race and gender as she stated,

I am the minority in my community of the folks that I work with and the families that I serve. I have to be mindful not just about the gender in a leadership role and how that can impact how people interact with me, but also my race. I have to be mindful of how I walk and how I move and how I present and ensure that I give safe space for everyone in my community.

Ms. Barnes serves middle school where she believes “relationships are everything.” She believes that she is stronger when people know each other well and can care for each other. Ms. Young made a statement about the risk she experiences as a Black woman and why she is mindful of her self-care in the principalship. Ms. Young stated,

Being a Black woman places me at risk, but then, for that reason, I'm mindful of paying attention to self-care. Because I know I need it, and being in the places where I know I can be fed so that when I face various situations where I feel like I'm at risk, or under threat, or, more importantly, being made invisible, which I think is probably one of the bigger risks within the principalship, that because I'm managing self-care, then I can

continue to do my work, and really invest myself and not be undermined by that experience.

Mr. Jones brought to light the attitudes and beliefs of a Black male that may impact his work as a principal. Mr. Jones explained,

Being a Black male and making sure that you're strong and all the things, but also making sure that I present myself professionally at all times is important for also building culture in the school and making sure that everybody is taken care of. I think that's important. Like I said, I do that mostly here by realizing and saying, "Hey, not in a good place. Let me go in my office." I'll tell the office staff, "I'm just going to go close my door for a minute."

In the survey, principals were asked about their awareness of their triggers and stressors, as well as how they can regulate their own behaviors. Of the Black principals who responded to the survey, 72% strongly agree or agree that they can regulate their behaviors. Whereas 23% of Black principals stated that they disagree or strongly disagree that they can regulate their own behaviors, 100% of White principals who responded stated that they can regulate their own behaviors.

**Table 4.19**

*Principals' Psychological Awareness by Race*

Strength of agreement	American Indian	Black	Hispanic/Latino	White	Other
0-1 days	0%	31%	100%	37.5%	0%
2 days	1000%	46%	0%	62.5%	50%
3-4 days	0%	15%	0%	25%	0%
5 or more days	0%	8%	0%	37.5%	50%

Ms. Woods discussed the importance of the district equity policy and the work around the policy and how that is self-care to her. She also made a statement about the representation of the district leadership and the impact that has on her own self-care. Ms. Woods stated,

The leadership in our district is becoming much more diverse. That is self-care to me, quite frankly, because I know that there's value. They see value in me and what I do because, well, I have leaders who look like me. And that, to me, is also self-care.

Black principals' self-care practices are important, particularly for their psychological and emotional well-being.

### **Chapter Summary**

Findings from this study identify personal and professional self-care attitudes, beliefs, and practices of Title I principals in one North Carolina school district. This study also illustrates how principals' race impacts self-care practices. Title 1 principals from one school district in North Carolina participated in a Qualtrics survey for the researcher to gain an overview of self-care practices. I then interviewed principal participants to learn more about their personal and professional self-care attitudes, beliefs, and practices and how their race may impact their self-care practice. The principal participants' profiles were included for reference for the reader. I constructed themes for each research question. Those themes were: exercise, nutrition, and sleep are a priority for some principals but not all; psychological and emotional awareness is a must for all principals; principals rely on their spirituality; principals work hard and are intentional about setting limits for self-care; professional relationships and support are the key to success for some principals; self-advocacy is important for some principals but not all; principals find the joy and trauma which boosts their energy; and Black principals perceive greater risk to their

mental health. In the next chapter, I will provide a discussion of the findings as they relate to existing literature and implications for professional practice, policy, and future research.

## **CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION**

This study aimed to learn about the self-care attitudes, beliefs, and practices of principals leading in Title 1 schools in one district. The purpose of this chapter is to present a discussion of findings from Chapter 4, implications for practice and policy, and recommendations for further study. First, I summarize the findings from Chapter 4 by research question. Next, I discuss the findings related to other literature, which includes the limitations of the study and implications for policy and practice. Lastly, I provide recommendations for further research and a conclusion.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive study is to explore the self-care practices of principals leading Title 1 schools within one North Carolina school district. Specifically, the findings from this study may help school-level principals navigate the stress of the daily job, increase overall health, and decrease principal turnover rates. This research aims to empower principals to take ownership of their self-care practices both personally and professionally.

### **Summary of Findings**

#### **Research Question 1**

The first research question of this study was: What are the personal self-care attitudes, beliefs, and practices of principals leading in Title 1 schools in one North Carolina school district? According to survey data, principals were divided with regard to exercise, nutrition, and sleep; some made exercise a priority in their personal self-care practices while others did not. The individual principal interviews uncovered that principals were aware of the importance of self-care practices, and the impact that exercise, nutrition, and sleep have on their own health. Most of the principals interviewed have implemented or are in the process of implementing a health and fitness plan and routine into their personal self-care practices that meet their



individual needs. The survey data and the individual interview data directly correlated in a way that the principals agreed that their psychological and emotional awareness is important for their personal self-care. Finally, principals strongly identified with their spirituality both in the survey and in the individual principal interviews; spirituality is an important factor in their personal self-care practices.

### **Research Question 2**

This study examined a second research question: What are the professional self-care attitudes, beliefs, and practices of principals leading in Title 1 schools in one North Carolina school district? From this question, I hoped to learn the different ways in which principals perceive and enact professional self-care practices. Principals work hard and are intentional in setting limits for self-care. Principals demonstrated through survey data that self-advocacy is a way to advocate for change. All of this work leads to the true focus of what the principals stated several times throughout the study of what brings them joy, bringing the focus back to the students, or student work.

### **Research Question 3**

The last question that this study explored was: What, if any, differences exist in self-care attitudes, beliefs, and practices among principals of different races in Title 1 schools in one North Carolina school district? From this question, I hoped to learn if the principals' race had any impact on their personal or professional self-care. I identified the following theme: Black principals perceive greater risk to their mental health. Black principals' psychological and emotional awareness are extremely important for their personal and professional self-care.

## Discussion of Findings

This study shows that there needs to be a more intentional focus on the self-care practices of principals' overall well-being needs to occur. Participants from the survey and interview show that they are practicing personal and professional self-care, showing an awareness of the need to practice self-care, or beginning to implement specific practices into daily self-care. While the COVID-19 pandemic was a turning point that brought focus to many principals' well-being, change is necessary for both the personal and professional areas of self-care to ensure that principals can meet the needs not only for themselves but of their entire school community.

Participants who were interviewed in this study agree that personal self-care practices are necessary for their career, but not all principals are making their personal self-care a priority. Over half of the participants reported exercising between zero to two times per week. Participants who found exercise beneficial for stress management understood the connection between exercise, sleep, and nutrition. The career of a principal can be stressful. Stressors can lead to feelings of exhaustion, frustration, numerous physical symptoms, abnormal food cravings, and much more (Sorenson, 2007). Nutrition is very important, and 64% of the participants reported missing 3-7 meals per week due to work. Overall, principals reported averaging 6 or more hours of sleep per night. With that said, 68% of the participants reported waking up from their sleep between 3-7 times per night. Principals make several complex decisions daily that demand pristine cognitive function and attention to detail. The Centers for Disease Control (2024) recommends that the average adult receive seven to eight hours of good-quality sleep per night. Good quality sleep means that the adult does not wake up in the middle of the night. Cognitive function becomes adversely effective after four consecutive nights of less than seven hours of sleep (Goel et al., 2009). This study has similar patterns to a previous study

by Ray et al. (2020) that focused on self-care practices. The patterns are similar to personal self-care practices, specifically in nutrition, exercise, and sleep in that both studies, school principals are not meeting the recommended amount of daily exercise. Both studies showed that principals are missing meals due to work. Ray et al. (2020) found that 40% of principals are sleep deprived. This study found that many principals are receiving six or more hours of sleep, but the participants are waking up several times per night. According to the CDC (2024), the participants in this study are not receiving good-quality sleep. The school principal can be both a rewarding and stressful career; therefore, principals must have personal and professional self-care practices in place. Researchers from New Zealand suggest that principals experience significantly higher rates of burn-out, sleeplessness, and stress than other professions (Riley, 2017).

Participants are keenly aware of their psychological and emotional awareness and understand the importance of personal self-care practices to ensure balance. Although each participant's personal self-care practice looks different, one unifying factor is that each participant understands that they have an individual need for psychological and emotional health that must be met. The medical industry stresses that chronic stress may lead to elevated blood pressure, problems with sleep, anxiety, headaches or backaches, or a state of continued hyperarousal (Kabat-Zinn, 2009). Mahfouz and Richardson (2021) argue that the social-emotional well-being of principals has not been prioritized in years past. Furthermore, regular exercise for principals is important as the reports state that exercise reduces both anxiety and depression (Brosse et al., 2002).

Finally, a large representation of the participants rely on spirituality; which is different from other studies as spirituality was not a focus or was not mentioned in the other studies. This finding could be a novel one partly because of the area in which the study occurred; it is well

understood that religion seems to play a role in society and politics in the southern United States (Lipka, 2016). Through this study, the definition of spirituality was different to different participants. Different participants viewed spirituality as a meditative walk through the forest, a Bible app on their phone, or worship in a church setting. According to research, no matter the experience level, for both experienced and novice meditators, a single meditation session could lower the effects of physiological sources of anger (Finnell et al., 2016). Researchers on experienced, mindful meditators found that those who meditate are more able to suppress automatic responses (Moore & Malinowski, 2009). Research suggests that reading the Bible will offset the negative effects of stress and those who read the Bible more often are more likely to use religious coping strategies when stressful events arise (Krause & Pargament, 2018).

This study also explored: What are the professional self-care attitudes, beliefs, and practices of principals leading in Title 1 schools in one North Carolina school district? Survey responses show that about half of the participants are intentionally taking short breaks during the day, which means proper planning in the professional workday happens for these breaks. Taking short breaks may be one way of preventing burn-out.

Principals demonstrated strong relationships in the professional setting. Participants believe that relationships are a high priority within professional self-care practices as 71% agree and strongly agree to using professional support. When a principal has the opportunity to collaborate with others to work through challenges or adversities, a sense of community exists over having to cope alone, which allows for increased communication and problem-solving within the team (Bartanen et al., 2019).

A way for principals' voices to be heard is through self-advocacy. Self-advocacy is important for principals according to the survey and the individual interviews. Principals

identified ways that they advocate for change in principal working conditions in individual interview sessions. Research shows that professional self-care consists of advocating for oneself when you are overworked or about to reach burn-out (Wilson, 2023). Identifying and attending to individual self-care practices both professionally and personally will likely aid in maximizing professional growth and promoting overall well-being (Posluns & Gall, 2020).

Principals often find themselves regenerating and gaining energy by engaging with students. Students help them find their joy and remember their passion and purpose, especially when traumatic and stressful events occur. Principals identified that they must be self-aware to step back from the administrative work and visit a classroom or recess with the students. This break will re-energize the principal by being surrounded by students, which is how they find joy and oftentimes, the reason why they are in the career. Being able to identify and attend to individual self-care practices both professionally and personally will likely aid in maximizing professional growth and promoting overall well-being (Posluns & Gall, 2020).

The final question that this study investigated was: What, if any, differences exist in self-care attitudes, beliefs, and practices among principals of different races in Title 1 schools in one North Carolina school district? Participants' attitudes, beliefs, and practices demonstrated that differences do exist in self-care practices for principals of different races.

One of the biggest challenges or a turning point in the principalship for Black principals was the COVID-19 pandemic. Many of the Black principals in this study face psychological and emotional stressors that force a change to their personal and professional self-care practices. This finding directly aligns with research that suggests that Black and Hispanic individuals may be affected by stressors exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic due to the higher chronic stressors they experience in the United States in comparison to White individuals (Al-Amin et al., 2023).

Principals of color are generally more likely to lead in schools in urban locations and schools in which 75% or more of the student population is experiencing poverty (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). This study magnifies the psychological and emotional needs of Black principals. The research aligns with managing the stress from racial trauma and other conflicts occurring in schools as it adds to the work and stress of principals, especially Black principals (Clarida, 2023). This study makes a clear argument that Black male principals have different psychological and emotional needs than Black female principals. There is a heightened awareness of mental health related to racial inequities and how people experience mental health (Fowers & Wan, 2020). One participant clearly stated that he thinks the stigma is changing for Black males around mental health. An analysis showed that African Americans are 21% less likely to use mental health services when compared to the White population. Hispanics and Latinos are 25% less likely to utilize mental health services in comparison to the White population (Clay, 2016). While there have not been many studies conducted on this specific topic, Steiner et al. (2022) shared their survey results for State of the American Principals in hopes of restoring the well-being of the principals as one of the steps to rebuilding schools. There is a close relationship between the results of this research question with Black principals and their mental health. This research question demonstrated that Black principals' psychological and emotional needs are of high priority and a large part of participants' personal and professional self-care practices.

### **Summary**

Being a school leader is a very rewarding career but stressful. Having healthy and effective school leaders is essential for positive student outcomes (Ni et al., 2018). Principals have to be healthy not only for themselves, but also for teachers, students, and the school

community as a whole. The school leader is the most important when it comes to supporting the teacher and second, only to the teacher, when raising student achievement (Grissom et al., 2021).

The participants of this survey data reported that 56% of respondents strongly agree and agree that the self-care practices of the school principal are related to student achievement. The impact of principal turnover is significant on the entire school community, especially on student achievement.

### **Reflections on The Self-Care Framework for Social Workers Theoretical Framework**

The idea of focusing on self-care practices in addition to the principal preparation program defines the whole principal. The relationship between the principal and the personal and professional self-care practices that they utilize could impact how effective the principal is at leading the school. The framework for this study promotes the development of self-care practices that are best for the individual principal as a person inside and outside of the school. The principal position of a school can be very isolating which can cause burn-out. “Self-care may not only be crucial in preventing secondary traumatic stress, burn-out, and high staff turnover, but it can serve as a means of empowerment that enables practitioners to proactively and intentionally negotiate their overall health, well-being, and resilience” (Lee & Miller, 2013, p. 96).

The self-care framework for social workers consists of personal and professional self-care that guided this study (Lee & Miller, 2013). Lee and Miller (2013) have identified five primary pillars for personal self-care: (a) physical, (b) social, (c) leisure, (d) psychological/emotional, and (e) spiritual and six additional pillars for professional self-care: (a) workload and time management, (b) professional social support and self-advocacy, (c) revitalization and generalization of energy, (d) attention to the professional role, (e) professional development, and (f) attention to reactions at work.

The theoretical framework guided this study in several ways. Chapter 2 strengthened the need for self-care practices by using existing research to justify the importance and the need for professional and personal self-care practice for principals. Chapter 3 described how the theoretical framework guided the data collection and analysis of the study. The participants engaged in a survey to collect basic data about personal and professional self-care practices that they are currently practicing. The framework also guided the interview process, which used a descriptive qualitative approach and allowed for more insight into current self-care practices.

This theoretical framework guided the research questions in my study as I focused on exploring both personal and professional self-care practices of principals. In terms of data collection, when I administered surveys and conducted interviews with principals from Title I schools in the selected school district, I aligned the questions with the different components of personal and professional self-care practices. The framework proved to be very effective in the collection of data as the survey data and the interview questions aligned efficiently.

The use of the theoretical framework guided the study from the development of the survey and interview questions to the data collection. After conducting this study and analyzing the data, participants stated that setting intentional boundaries for their personal and professional self-care practices is one of their strongest self-care practices. No changes to the theoretical framework need to be made based on the findings from my study.

### **Limitations**

A limitation in this study has to do with the third research question: What, if any, differences exist in self-care attitudes, beliefs, and practices among principals of different races in Title 1 schools in one North Carolina school district? All of the principals serving in Title 1 schools at all levels, elementary, middle, and high school, were emailed the survey and asked to



participate in the individual interviews. However, a diverse pool of respondents did not exist for either the survey or the interview. Of the participants who recorded their race for the survey, 4% were American Indian, 57% were Black or African American, 4% were Hispanic or Latino, and 35% were White. For the interview portion of the study, several participants volunteered to participate. The participants who volunteered through the survey process were either Black or African American or White. Attempts were made to interview principals of other races but the attempts were unsuccessful.

Survey data showed that participants may benefit from more intentional focus around sleep. However, I did not ask interview participants direct questions related to sleep, which limited my understanding of this finding about sleep habits.

Another limitation that existed within the survey was that the participants needed to have a level of awareness of their own practices to answer the questions in the survey honestly. The participants in the interview also had to have a level of awareness of their own practices to be able to answer the questions in the interview honestly.

## **Implications of the Study for Policy and Practice**

### **Implications for Policy**

The findings from this study reflect Title 1 principals serving in one school district in North Carolina. The findings of this study have implications for the principals, students, teachers, and the entire school community. Participants from the survey and interview show that they are practicing personal and or professional self-care, showing an awareness of the need to practice self-care, or beginning to implement specific practices into daily practice.

District-wide equity policy could impact many stakeholders from students and teachers to community members. Having an equity policy that has language that is inclusive for all races and

genders and that makes a clear connection between equity and mental health could help to cease stigmas and stereotypes. This language could aid in allowing all principals to focus on the work of leading the school and being psychologically safe to do so at the same time.

Allocating funding towards mental health is highly recommended to support school principals. Specifically, allocating funding for district-wide positions that specifically focus on the wellness of principals would be beneficial.

Policy initiatives around mental health to support the whole principal could also be beneficial. Examples of policies that can be implemented to support the health and well-being of the school principal are mental health days, scheduled lunch breaks, and limited time on duty. These examples are a few that could potentially aid in the well-being of the principal and decrease burn-out.

### **Implications for Practice**

One of the largest implications for practice brought forward by findings in this study may be implemented in changes in practice. One change that would likely impact principals' well-being would be to offer a training program for the principal preparation program at the university level. Principal preparation programs' primary goals are to train principals with the tools needed to be effective leaders (Grissom et al., 2019). Therefore, this training would not only discuss the personal and professional self-care practices mentioned in this study but also develop an implementation plan for the aspiring principal. On the personal self-care aspects, principals would be trained on topics such as nutrition, exercise, sleep, and how to properly plan for self-care practices with a busy schedule. Principals would be trained not only on the benefits of all three and how they work together but also on the adverse effects of not properly implementing personal self-care. For professional self-care practices, principals would be trained on how to

properly schedule breaks, save time for lunch, engage in self-advocacy, and how to make connections and build authentic relationships with colleagues. Like personal self-care practices, principals would be trained on the benefits of implementing professional self-care practices.

Another implication for practice is related to the onboarding process for new principals' school districts. Findings from this study show that relationships are important. Therefore, mentorship that is directly aligned with the university in the implementation of personal and professional self-care practices for the new principal could be very impactful for the entire school community. Ongoing professional development for current principals may meet the needs of the individual principal. Continued education from the state should be implemented for superintendents to be able to identify burn-out in others, specifically principals. This education could be taught as a hybrid model between local universities and hospitals from medical professors or professionals that have extensive background and clinical knowledge on burn-out. This collaboration between professions, universities, and school districts may give principals the support they need and have gone without for many years.

Lastly, policy change could be addressed at the state level by making a change to the principal evaluation, which would make self-care a priority for all principals. Holding principals accountable for their personal and professional self-care practices sets a standard that the state has for school and community leaders. As a leader of a school, a role model for students, teachers, and the school community, this change would support the leader being physically and emotionally at their best for the entire school community.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

This study provided information about attitudes, beliefs, and practices of personal and professional self-care practices of principals in Title 1 schools. Further research should be

conducted around the third research question, centered around self-care and the race of the principals. Based on my findings, further research on how differences exist in attitudes, beliefs, and practices among principals of different races is needed. This research could show how principals of other races may be impacted by the principalship and how different self-care practices can be used to alleviate stress and optimize well-being and decrease principal turnover.

An additional recommendation for further research is to include a study on gender and how principals of different genders may have different attitudes, beliefs, and practices related to personal and professional self-care. For example, future research may allow for insight into the female principal as she goes through life stages from motherhood to menopause and navigates the principalship during those life stages continue while continuing to lead the school.

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive study is to explore the self-care practices of principals leading in Title 1 schools within North Carolina. Specifically, the findings from this study may help school-level principals navigate the stress of the daily job, increase overall health, and decrease principal turnover rates. The participants in this study were all principals in Title 1 schools in one school district in North Carolina. The findings from this study show that some principals focus on their personal self-care practices but not all make their self-care a priority. The findings also show that race impacts principals' personal and professional self-care practices specifically around their mental health. Finally, findings from this study show that professional self-care practices are necessary for effective school leaders.

Implications for policy, practice, and future research may begin at the university level targeting the principal preparation program to ensure that future principals have the knowledge and the ability to implement self-care practices for both their personal and professional life.

Universities and school districts may use this research to collaborate with and implement new research regarding the self-care practices of principals. Changes at the state level to the principal evaluation could hold the principal accountable for their well-being. Holding the school principal accountable to be physically and emotionally at peak performance for the entire school community could help ensure that stress levels are minimized and principal turnover decreases.

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## APPENDICES

## Appendix A: Qualtrics Survey

### Personal Self-Care

#### Physical

How many times per week do you exercise? 0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7

How many hours of sleep do you get per night? Less than 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, more than 9

How many times per week do you wake up in the middle of the night? 0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7

How many times per week do you eat breakfast? 0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7

How many times per week do you miss meals due to work? 0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 or more

#### Psychological and Emotional

I am aware of my own triggers, stressors, and how to regulate my own behaviors.

Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree

When I am under stress, my stress impacts others. Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree,

Strongly Disagree

#### Social

How often does work affect your personal relationships? never, not often, sometimes, often, all the time

How many times per week do you sacrifice personal relationships for work? 0,1,2,3,4,5, 6, 7

#### Leisure

I participate in leisure activities. Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree

How many days per week do you participate in these leisure activities? 0,1,2,3,4,5, 6, 7

#### Spiritual

I have spiritual practices in place to ensure personal self-care practices. Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree

How many days per week do you participate in personal spiritual self-care practices?  
0,1,2,3,4,5,6,7

### Professional Self-Care

#### Professional Development

I use professional support to develop my skill sets.

Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree

#### Professional Support and Self-Advocacy

I seek out regular mentorship. Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree

I currently advocate for my own needs in the school district. Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree

#### Attention to Reactions to Work

I have strategies in place to manage my own reactions for when I experience news, both good and bad, of the students and families that I serve. Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree

#### Workload and Time management

I take small breaks during the day. Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree  
I limit the amount of work I talk about outside of work. Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree

**Attention to Professional Role**

When collaborating with others, I can identify my role on the team. Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree  
When working with teachers, they have autonomy in their work. Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree

**Revitalization and Generation of Energy**

I have systems or structures in place to constantly remind myself of my passion. Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree  
I believe my self-care practices are related to student achievement. Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree

**Demographics Questions:**

How long have you been a school principal?  
What level is your school? Elementary, Middle, High  
Where are you in your career as an educator? Early (0-3 years), Middle (4-20 years), Advanced (21-30 years)  
What is your gender? Male, Female, Non-Binary  
What is your race? White, Black or African American, Hispanic or Latino, Asian, American Indian or Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, Two or More Races, Other  
Are you interested in participating in an interview about your self-care practices? Yes, No

If the response to #29 is yes, participants will provide their email address.

## **Appendix B: Interview Protocol**

This study aims to better understand the self-care practices of school principals leading low-wealth schools in North Carolina. Your participation will remain confidential. Interview transcripts, recordings, and related research content are confidential and will not be used beyond the scope of this study. Participant names will be changed. At any point, if you need to take a break, please let me know.

### **A few basic questions to start the interview**

1. Tell me a little bit about yourself, including about your career.
2. How long have you been serving as a school principal?
3. What is your race?
4. What is your gender?
5. What does self-care mean to you?
6. What is the source of your knowledge about self-care practices?

### **Personal Self-Care Practices**

#### **Physical**

7. As a principal, how do you take care of yourself physically? Give wait time: For example, sleep, nutrition, exercise.

#### **Psychological and Emotional**

8. What practices do you engage in that support your psychological wellness?
- 8a. As a Black female principal, how does your race and gender impact your self-care practices or your mental health?
9. What practices do you engage in that support your emotional wellness? For example, how are you able to recognize your own strengths, triggers, and regulate your emotions?

#### **Social**

10. How do your relationships support your personal self-care?

#### **Leisure**

11. How do your leisure activities promote your personal self-care?

#### **Spiritual**

12. What strategies do you have built into your routine to promote spirituality? If struggling, offer examples: For example, taking walks in nature, meditation, and reflection.

### **Professional Self-Care Practices Framework Questions**

### **Professional Development**

13. What are some formal professional practices that you participate in to grow your knowledge and comfort about using self-care in the professional setting? Formal means planned.

14. What informal professional practices do you participate in to grow your knowledge and comfort about using self-care in the professional setting? Informal means allowing the appropriate practice to meet daily life or become integrated into one's life.

14a. To what extent did your principal preparation program train you in self-care practices?

### **Professional Support and Self-Advocacy**

15. Do you feel administrators need to be particularly mindful of their self-care? Why or why not?

16. How do you identify, research, and appropriately advocate for changes in work conditions where and when necessary?

### **Attention to Reactions to Work**

17. The role of a principal can be taxing and very rewarding; all of this calls for principals to tend to their own reactions. What are some activities that you put in place to aid in stress relief at work? Wait time- Ex) deep breathing, breaks, calling a mentor, walk

### **Workload and Time management**

18. What systems do you put in place to prioritize among your many work tasks?

19. What strategies do you put in place for mindful management of work task completion?

### **Attention to Professional Role**

20. How does being a building administrator promote self-care practices?

### **Revitalization and Generation of Energy**

21. How does the district advocate for healthy self-care practices for principals?

22. What do you do professionally to ensure mental well-being in the workplace for your self and for others?