Trust and Leadership: How Exemplary Superintendents Build Successful Principal Teams in Elementary School Districts

Louann Carlomagno

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Trust and Leadership: How Exemplary Superintendents Build Successful Principal Teams in Elementary School Districts

A Dissertation by

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

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ABSTRACT

Trust and Leadership: How Exemplary Superintendents Build Successful Principal Teams in Elementary School Districts

by Louann Carlomagno

Purpose: The purpose of this phenomenological study was to identify and describe behaviors exemplary superintendents practice during leadership team meetings to build and maintain trust with their principals based on the facets of trust defined by Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (benevolence, reliability, competency, honesty, and openness).

Methodology: The qualitative use of phenomenology was utilized in this study. Respondents were able to tell their stories, providing semistructured feedback in order for the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of trust building during leadership team meetings. The researcher interviewed 16 principals from Sonoma and San Mateo Counties.

Findings: Examination of qualitative data from the 16 principals participating in this study indicated a variety of findings and themes. These themes were (a) following through consistently on next steps and requests; (b) creating a nurturing environment; (c) fostering open and honest conversations with members of the leadership team; (d) being open to discussing difficult or controversial topics; (e) having the “backs” of their principals; (f) having strong communication before, during, and after meetings; (g) using past experience in demonstrating knowledge about complex topics; (h) listening with an open heart and open mind; (i) modeling their own humanness and vulnerability; (j) creating a “safe space” for all principals to have a voice; (k) serving as an inspirational leader who cares about all staff; (l) providing community building and welcoming
activities; (m) following up with individual principals after the meeting; (n) making
decisions after taking all input into consideration; and (o) being forthcoming in owning
and accepting their own errors.

**Conclusions:** The study supported eight conclusions including (a) initiate a
communication plan with principals, (b) develop intentional meeting structure, (c) share
past experiences in decision-making, (d) seek multiple perspectives from principals,
(e) prioritize the needs of principals, (f) model vulnerability and empathy, (g) turn
missteps into opportunities, and (h) empower principal voice and agency.

**Recommendations:** Future qualitative or mixed methods studies exploring trust building
throughout school districts are recommended. A longitudinal mixed methods study
following principals throughout their careers and their trust-building partnerships with
their superintendents would be highly informative.
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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

A new superintendent is selected to serve in a district where she previously served as a teacher, vice-principal, principal, and curriculum director. Additionally, she is a former student in the district and currently the parent of a high school student in the district. Based on the breadth of these experiences, she is knowledgeable about the range of management issues within the district and is confident in her ability to take on this new role with high expectations for success. She is welcomed with open arms by every administrator in the district and the bargaining units within the district. The local newspaper editor writes that he has never seen a superintendent hired in this school district who has been so widely celebrated.

The superintendent is elated and excited to begin the difficult work of being the instructional and educational leader of the school district. She meets with parents, students, teachers, and the community to gather input by offering an opportunity for all stakeholders to share their thinking and suggestions on how the district can succeed. As researched by Glass (2005), it is this relationship building with stakeholders that is one of the most important factors in superintendent effectiveness. As the weeks pass, the celebration of new leadership in the district soon settles down, and the day-to-day operations of the district begin.

The new superintendent loses sleep thinking about how the district should address the enormous gap in student achievement, how the district can support teachers who both need and want to improve their instructional skills, how the district can invite parents to be partners in the schools, how the district can support principals who ultimately support classroom teachers, what range of resources and personnel have the greatest impact on
students, and who exactly is “the district?” The superintendent quickly realizes that she and “the district” are synonymous and the reality facing her is that she is in charge of all facets of the district and, most importantly, in charge of the day-to-day education of all the students in her district.

This new superintendent also recognizes that in order to have the greatest impact on student learning, she must work closely with each principal in order to maintain a meaningful connection to each school site. The venue where the work in developing this partnership most effectively takes place is during monthly leadership team meetings where all principals come together to meet with the superintendents and district-level staff. Through experience, this superintendent soon learns that these meetings have a tremendous impact and are the place where she is best able to move forward the collective actions of the district. As superintendent, she sets the tone of these meetings and has the opportunity to model behaviors and actions she expects to be replicated in her principals. She sees these meetings as one of the most critical venues where trust can be built supporting the foundation of the work across the district. However, no one has given her the “formula” for building trust with her principals in her new role as superintendent, and no one has explained what she needs to do to be sure her principals leave these meetings feeling trusted and respected. She has a long road ahead, learning how to build and maintain trust with her staff. Trust is built by new superintendents when they act with consistency and when they behave in ways that demonstrate their actions are being done for the right reasons (Ripley, Mitchell, & Richman, 2013).
Brief History of Education

*Educate and inform the whole mass of the people. They are the only sure reliance for the preservation of our liberty.*

—Thomas Jefferson, December 31, 1787

Similar to the views of Thomas Jefferson, whose reputation as a founding father of public education has not waivered (Carpenter, 2013), school districts across the nation are focusing on supporting students to reach their full potential while creating an educational environment in which students become informed citizens. An American education that began as a social experiment is now the fundamental right of every child. Both superintendents and principals are the leaders in this educational endeavor and expected to set the course of learning for every student.

Historically, the most basic goal of public education was to create and educate responsible citizens. This concept stems from the work of John Dewey who espoused that in the end, school systems should graduate students who are active participants in a democratic society (Steinhardt, 2004). This active participation in a democratic society has changed substantially over the years. Students today are no longer waiting for adults and politicians to make sense of their world; they are the ones who are leading changes they want to see. They are the ones who are leading marches to support climate change initiatives; they are the ones who are holding anti-gun rallies across the United States, and they are the ones who will become future leaders.

Public schools in the United States were not always inclusive of all children and did not exclusively focus on academic subjects. Schools in the 1600s taught the virtues of religion and community and essentially ignored academic subjects such as English and
math. That focus changed dramatically with the teaching of academics becoming the sole responsibility of public schools in the mid-19th century (American Board, 2015). In the late 1800s, a majority of states passed compulsory attendance laws, but it took until 1918 before all states enacted compulsory school statutes (Katz, 1976). Moreover, society was changing rapidly and the nation’s schools were not adequately preparing their students for jobs that were moving from agriculture and small manufacturing to industrial corporations (“The 1900s Education: Overview,” 2003). Our current-day educational system faces similar challenges in preparing students for the jobs of the future, jobs that have yet to be created (Wagner, 2010).

**The Role of the Superintendent and Principal**

As educational systems have evolved over the course of the last 100 years, so have the roles of the superintendent and principal. The roles of the superintendent and principal are alike in that both are positions of power with authority to oversee district staff. Both roles are complex and involve building strong relationships with stakeholders. Districts simply do not excel if the relationship between the superintendent and principals is not strong (West & Derrington, 2009).

Superintendents in 2019 have a role, which in addition to serving students, staff, and families, includes serving as public relations officers, political advocates, finance experts, and labor negotiators. Principals, in addition to being instructional leaders, also serve as counselors, safety coordinators, and site managers. These two positions, superintendent and principal, are the most publicly recognized in a school district and therefore the actions taken by these leaders are regularly under scrutiny (Hughes & Karp, 2004).
While there are many leadership roles and responsibilities for superintendents, one critical focus area includes the support and oversight of principals. In order for superintendents to address both educational and instructional leadership with principals, they must build and sustain a strong foundation of trust. Principals want to turn to their superintendent without fear of discipline or retribution when they need help addressing a pressing problem (West & Derrington, 2009). There is a small likelihood that this type of communication will take place unless principals have a trusting relationship with their superintendent.

The trust relationship between the superintendent and principals can become complicated when considering reform goals and mandates that impact all levels of a school district. According to Carter and Cunningham (1997), “Governmental and bureaucratic regulations usually require surveillance and increased paperwork; however, seldom is there any evidence of improved educational performance. In fact, the pressure on the superintendent is more for compliance than for producing educational improvement” (p. 65). Principals are caught in the middle of implementing mandates that they may or may not support while also balancing the needs of their classroom teachers who had no voice in the creation of these mandates (Yeagley, 2008). The challenge is ongoing when balancing the needs of the school site and the needs of the overall district. The daily running of the school district is complicated as both superintendents and principals work to satisfy the needs of federal and state government, the local community, and parents as well as developing relationships with teachers and support staff. Working with trust as a foundational element in these relationships creates school districts that run both efficiently and effectively (West & Derrington, 2009).
Trust in Organizations and its Implications

The best leaders in organizations understand that in order for others to trust them, they must first tell the truth to themselves. As leaders are willing to be honest with themselves, they increase their credibility with others. This credibility can be understood using the “4 Cores of Credibility” outlined by Covey (2008, p. 45). The first of the 4 Cores of Credibility focuses on integrity. Integrity can be described as acting in a way that is honest and forthright. It means following through on what one says one will do and taking these actions with honesty and transparency. It also means acting with humility and courage. The second of the 4 Cores of Credibility focuses on the competence of the leaders and the intent with which they act. Leaders build trust when they take actions that are mutually beneficial to all those involved, acting with openness and transparency. When leaders truly care about those they lead and serve, trust grows (Covey, 2008). The third of the 4 Cores of Credibility deals with the capability of the leader. In order for leaders to grow and extend trust, they must inspire confidence through their talents, attitudes, skills, knowledge, and style. Leaders must demonstrate that they understand the complexity of the organization and have the capabilities to move the organization in accomplishing its goals and initiatives.

The last of the 4 Cores of Credibility is tied to results. Leaders in organizations are ultimately held accountable for the results of those organizations. The bottom line is that leaders are expected to produce results. These results can include the creation of a facilities master plan, the hiring of effective educators, the completion of board-approved initiatives, or the measurement of student achievement on statewide assessments. Each of the 4 Cores of Credibility plays a role in the development of trust within an
organization. This trust model can be extended to school districts where the superintendent serves as the leader of the organization responsible for building trust with stakeholders including staff, parents, community, and students.

**Role of the Superintendent in Building Trust**

With a focus on student achievement, schools and districts must be committed to laying a foundation of trust throughout the organization (C. S. Allen, 2008; Bryk & Schneider, 2002). Trust impacts every organization and every relationship within that organization. As seminal author, Steven Covey (2008) attested,

> There is one thing that is common to every individual, relationship, team, family, organization, national economy, and civilization throughout the world—the one thing which, if removed will destroy the most powerful government, the most successful business, the most thriving economy, the most influential leadership, the great friendship, the strongest character, the deepest love.

> On the other hand, if developed and leveraged, that one thing has the potential to create unparalleled success and prosperity in every dimension of life. Yet, it is the least understood, most neglected, and most underestimated possibility of our time. That one thing is trust. (p. 1)

Every school leader, whether at the school site or the district office, has an opportunity to leverage trust to support the complex work of educating students yet determining how to best leverage this trust remains a challenge. Leadership is much more than the complex work of educating students; it also includes meeting the needs of those who work to set the vision of the district (Battle, 2007). More than any other action taken between superintendents and principals, trust is needed in order for educational
leaders to successfully move an organization toward the full implementation of its mission and vision. According to Weiss (2017), “The vision of the school district, the evaluation of principals, the priorities and the manner in which those priorities are communicated to and through principals, and all duties of the superintendent can either create conditions that improve or erode trust” (p. 7). Superintendents will not be effective in their roles if they do not have the trust of site principals. Based on work by Covey (2008), it is the leader of the organization who has the responsibility to determine the most effective ways to build trust throughout the organization. According to Covey (2008), the importance of trust cannot be overstated: “When trust is low, in a company or relationship, it places a hidden ‘tax’ on every transaction: every communication, every interaction, every strategy, every decision is taxed” (p. 2).

The role of the superintendent in building trust with principals includes actions by the superintendents demonstrating benevolence and caring, showing consideration of the needs of the principals, exhibiting competence by sharing knowledge and understanding of the complexities within a school district, modeling openness by creating an effective work environment. Trust continues to be built through transparent communication and shared decision-making, and being reliable and available consistently when principals need support (West & Derrington, 2009). Leaders in an organization who demonstrate integrity, share the intent of their actions through open communication, and have the knowledge, skills, and expertise to successfully carry out the work of the organization will build trust with stakeholders (Covey, 2008; West & Derrington, 2009; Zepeda & Mayers, 2013). Strong leaders build trust by being trustworthy themselves; they model actions that they want to see from those they lead. It is the sincerity of this relationship
that allows people to demonstrate vulnerability and a willingness to create an
environment where trust can be built and maintained. Covey (2008), in describing the 4
Cores of Credibility, noted that the combination of integrity, intent, capabilities, and
results creates a culture of high trust. Utilizing these elements of trust building also
allows superintendents to not only trust their own decision making but will also allow
them to build trust across the school district.

Models and frameworks for building trust throughout an organization include a
business framework developed by Shaw (1997) that is also useful in evaluating trust in
school districts. As explained by Shaw (1997), “Trust has become ever more important
because it helps us manage complexity, foster a capacity for action, enhances
collaboration and increases organizational learning” (p. 17). Key imperatives described
in Shaw’s trust framework (1997) in the development of trust come from acting with
integrity, demonstrating concern, and achieving results. These imperatives, while
focused on trust building in businesses, are also applicable to trust building within a
school district. Shaw (1997) explained that trust is “belief that those whom we depend
will meet our expectations of them” (p. 21) and further concluded that “for high levels of
trust to exist, these factors [results, integrity and concern] must be exhibited and practiced
consistently” (p. 29).

Carter and Cunningham (1997) explained that superintendents are the “lead
learners” in a school district, “held to very high standards in a very public arena” (p. 19).
While simultaneously leading the district, superintendents also model and participate in
professional learning, oversee the daily operations of the school district, and build trust
through honest and open interactions with staff and community. Building trust with
stakeholders throughout the organization, especially in the early days of a
superintendency, is critical for a superintendent to have long-term success in that district
(Ripley et al., 2013). In working to build trust with district stakeholders, superintendents
are able to use the same strategies in building trust with principals. Superintendents must
also model what they want to see in the principals they lead. Bryk and Schneider (2002)
defined trust in terms of interactions between individuals and referred to this as relational
trust. Relational trust, according to Bryk and Schneider (2002), is trust that “is formed
through the mutual understandings that arise out of the sustaining associations among
individuals and institutions” (p. 6). Research indicates that trust is based on behaviors
including benevolence, reliability, competency, honesty, and openness, creating a culture
that focuses on results through demonstrations of integrity and concern for others (Hoy &
Tschannen-Moran, 1999; Shaw, 1997; Tschannen-Moran, 2014a; Tschannen-Moran &

**Trust and its Impact on School Sites and Student Learning**

As part of the continuum of work that occurs in school districts, trust becomes the
foundation for relationships at the district and school level. According to Battle (2007),
“Trustworthy environments are created when the leadership believes that all students can
learn and they encourage people to develop strategies to make it so” (p. 101). These
trustworthy environments are created by teachers at school sites with the support and
trust of their principal. In modeling what trust looks like and feels like, principals and
teachers are able to create environments that are conducive to increased student
achievement (Van Maele & Van Houtte, 2010). This type of support between principal
and teacher that results in increased student achievement is also critical in the relationship
between the superintendent and principal. As reported by Kellogg (2017), “The relationship between superintendent and principal is vital to implementing and sustaining the necessary changes to public education that lead to increased student achievement” (p. 22).

**Trust Building During Leadership Team Meetings**

Superintendents have the opportunity to model benevolence, reliability, competency, honesty, and openness each time they meet with a site principal. In districts with fewer than 5,000 students, there is a greater likelihood of interactions between the superintendent and principals to take place. It is during this time when elements of trust building can be modeled throughout the meeting. Superintendents have the opportunity to create a meeting environment where benevolence is modeled and practiced. According to West and Derrington (2009), “Benevolent leaders desire to ‘do good’ aside from any personal motive or personal gain. Benevolent leaders show consideration and sensitivity for the principal’s personal needs and interests” (p. 54). Superintendents are also able to prove they are both competent and reliable leaders during meetings when they are demonstrating skills that include problem-solving, active listening, and conflict resolution. Additionally, superintendents are able to share useful information with principals by addressing issues that are important to school sites. While it is critical for superintendents to be reliable and competent, research indicates that principals want superintendents with strong interpersonal relational skills (C. S. Allen, 2008; Anderson, 2016; Hatchel, 2013). These interpersonal relational skills include honesty and openness and a willingness to demonstrate vulnerability.
In creating agendas for team meetings with principals, superintendents consider how to address both the immediate and long-term needs of the district. Meeting agendas may include topics related to the managerial aspects of the district including budgets, facilities, and the daily workings of the school sites and district in addition to agenda items focused on instructional leadership as it relates to the teaching and learning in classrooms (Honig, Venkateswaran, & McNeil, 2017). When navigating complicated subjects such as principal evaluation, what it means to be an instructional leader, or how a superintendent can support the professional growth of principals and staff, trust between the superintendent and principals allows for open and honest conversations to occur (Hatchel, 2013). Modeling facets of trust including benevolence, reliability, competency, honesty, and openness will support principals in doing the same when hosting meetings at their own school sites. According to Anderson (2016), “The role of superintendent is vital since the manner in which superintendents choose to lead in their positions profoundly impacts followers within educational organizations” (p. 45).

During leadership team meetings, the behavior of the superintendent has a direct impact on principals, in some cases modeling what it means to exhibit vulnerability in support of building a strong team. While research by Kellogg (2017) focused on the factors experienced current and former superintendents and principals identify as important in developing and maintaining trust and research by Hvidston (2018) determined the importance of trust and communication between superintendents and principals during the evaluation process, where research is lacking is the analysis of how the relational-oriented facets of trust including benevolence, honesty, and openness and the competency-based facets of trust including reliability impact principals and
superintendents. Tschanen-Moran and Hoy have extensively studied trust with a focus on trust-building factors at the school level; however, analysis of trust building between principals and superintendents remains a less studied subject.

**Research Problem Statement**

Superintendents are the lead learners in a school district with the responsibility not only to oversee the educational program for all students in the district but also to oversee the learning of the educators in the district (Anderson, 2016). By hosting team meetings, also referred to as leadership team meetings, on a regular basis with their district-level leaders, principals, and assistant principals, superintendents provide opportunities for such learning to take place. Leadership team meetings also offer an opportunity for superintendents to build trust with staff who work for them, particularly site principals. Trust is an important construct to understand, especially during meetings where the superintendent is sharing a vision for the school district. Leadership team meetings are an opportunity for superintendents to coach principals in their roles as instructional leaders with the foundations of trust underlying their efforts. This type of coaching can have a profound effect on principals’ time spent on instructional leadership (Augustine et al., 2009). There are few opportunities in school districts when all leaders of the district are in the same room working on the goals of the school district. When they are together on during this specific time, priority should be given to topics related to instructional leadership rather than the managerial work of the district. While it is not the intent of superintendents to host meetings in which the focus is on the management rather than the leadership of the district, competing priorities sometimes leave superintendents without adequate time to prepare for the instructional leadership component of these
meetings (Bredeson, 1995). Regardless of the content of the meeting in terms of managerial or instructional leadership, the question remains unanswered in the literature whether certain facets of trust are needed for superintendents to build and maintain trust with site principals. In environments such as leadership team meetings, do the relational facets of trust, including openness, honesty, and benevolence or technical facets such as competency and reliability play a more important part in building and maintaining trust between principals and their superintendent?

Despite numerous studies on the general relationship of trust between principals and teachers (Hollingworth, Olsen, Asikin-Garmager, & Winn, 2018; Hoy, Gage, & Tarter, 2006; Hoy & Kupersmith, 1985) and the role of trust between principals and superintendents (Hatchel, 2013; Kellogg, 2017; Weiss, 2017), there is still a need to delve deeper into the opportunities for trust to be built between educational leaders and the meetings where these interactions occur. A few studies have identified the need for strong communications that impact principals and superintendents (J. A. Allen, Lehmann-Willenbrock, & Rogelberg, 2015; Honig et al., 2017) along with the importance of effective meetings (Jennings, 2007; Shafer, 2018; Sprain & Boromisza-Habashi, 2012), yet the research has not yet addressed how superintendents are able to build and maintain trust with their site principals during leadership team meetings.

**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to identify and describe behaviors exemplary superintendents practice during leadership team meetings to build and maintain trust with their principals based on the facets of trust defined by Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (benevolence, reliability, competency, honesty, and openness).
Research Central Question

The research central question for this study was, “What behaviors do exemplary superintendents practice that build and maintain trust, as experienced by principals during leadership team meetings, based on the facets of trust described by Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (benevolence, reliability, competency, honesty, and openness)?”

Research Subquestions

Sub RQ1: What behaviors do exemplary superintendents practice during leadership team meetings that build and maintain trust, as experienced by principals, based on benevolence?

Sub RQ2: What behaviors do exemplary superintendents practice during leadership team meetings that build and maintain trust, as experienced by principals, based on reliability?

Sub RQ3: What behaviors do exemplary superintendents practice during leadership team meetings that build and maintain trust, as experienced by principals, based on competency?

Sub RQ4: What behaviors do exemplary superintendents practice during leadership team meetings that build and maintain trust, as experienced by principals, based on honesty?

Sub RQ5: What behaviors do exemplary superintendents practice during leadership team meetings that build and maintain trust, as experienced by principals, based on openness?
Significance of the Problem

This phenomenological study focuses on identifying and describing behaviors principals’ lived experiences during leadership team meetings that build and maintain trust with their superintendent based on the facets of trust described by Tschannen-Moran and Hoy. Data for this study consisted of interviews. This study is significant in the following ways: First, this study will contribute to the existing body of literature that examines how trust is developed and maintained between principals and their superintendent (Hatchel, 2013; Howard, 2014; Kellogg, 2017; West & Derrington, 2009) by specifically focusing on the trust behaviors principals experience during leadership team meetings. Second, this study is significant in that it will identify ways in which superintendents demonstrate benevolence, reliability, competency, honesty, and openness during leadership team meetings addressing the components of trust based on the facets of trust described by Tschannen-Moran and Hoy. Third, this study will add significantly to the understanding of the role of trust in school settings expanding the work of Battle (2007) and Tschannen-Moran (2014a) based on the trust behaviors exhibited by leaders during leadership team meetings.

Furthermore, this study is significant to practitioners in the field as it will assist principals in understanding how to build and maintain trust with their faculty, ultimately supporting classroom teachers in building and maintaining trust with their students. Trends in the literature examine the factors that build strong relationships between teachers and their students (K. E. Harvey, 2013; Sullo, 2009) including the role trust plays in these relationships (Rousseau, Sitkin, Burt, & Camerer, 1998). This study will contribute to this body of literature by deepening the understanding of how trust can be
built and maintained through actions that show benevolence, demonstrating reliability, and competency through honest and open conversations.

The findings of this study will significantly add to the understanding practitioners have in the field on how trust is built and maintained through specific actions taken by the superintendent. One of the many benefits of this study would include researchers’ better understanding of how a trust relationship is built and maintained during leadership team meetings lending important insights into what superintendents can do to support the overall work of their principals while simultaneously modeling what principals can do to build trust with their teachers.

Definitions

The following are both theoretical and operational terms for this study. Theoretical definitions are cited from literature while operational definitions are the working definitions for this study.

Theoretical Definition

Trust. As defined by Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (1998), trust is “an individual’s or group’s willingness to be vulnerable to another party based on the confidence that the latter party is benevolent, reliable, competent, honest, and open” (p. 338).

Operational Definitions

Benevolence. Concern for others including demonstrations of thoughtfulness and kindness. Benevolent leaders support the vision of an organization, acknowledging the contributions and success of staff and expressing interest in the well-being of others (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000).
**Competency.** The ability to complete tasks and responsibilities effectively. A competent leader is one who completes tasks in a timely fashion, leading others in the organization to complete the goals while demonstrating the skills needed to perform their job well (Tschannen-Moran, 2014b).

**Honesty.** A combination of authenticity, integrity, and character (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000). Honest leaders accept responsibility for their actions without misrepresenting the truth or blaming others.

**Openness.** The willingness to delegate and share power through open communication and shared decision-making (Battle, 2007). Open leaders invite constructive criticism, are self-reflective, and willing to listen to others.

**Reliability.** The measure of an individual’s ability to be dependable and consistent while delivering what is required or expected (Battle, 2007). Reliable leaders keep promises, deliver on commitments, and prove themselves dependable.

**Elementary school district.** Any school district that serves students in kindergarten through eighth grade. A school district may serve any combination of students within those grade levels.

**Leadership team meetings.** Meetings that take place on a regular basis where the superintendent meets with principals and district-level administrators. Meetings focus on the business of the district and offer opportunities for the superintendent to speak with the entire administrative team.

**Instructional leadership.** A set of skills and strategies that impact the learning of teachers and students focused on effective management of people and resources. Strategies incorporated as part of strong instructional leadership include shared decision-
making, a learning-focused culture, improvement of instructional practices, allocation of resources, and management of systems and processes (Silverman, 2018; West & Derrington, 2009).

**Professional learning community (PLC).** An “ongoing process in which educators work collaboratively in recurring cycles of collective inquiry and action research to achieve better results for the students they serve” (DuFour, DuFour, & Eaker, 2006, p. 26).

**Delimitations**

Delimitations are the factors of a study that can be controlled and therefore provide the boundaries of the study (Patton, 2015). This study investigated the behaviors exemplary superintendents exhibit during leadership team meetings that build and maintain trust with principals. With approximately 10,000 schools in California, this study was delimited to 16 principals working in elementary school districts in Sonoma or San Mateo Counties whose superintendents have been identified as exemplary based on the following criteria:

1. Must have at least 2 years of experience serving as a principal with the same exemplary superintendent, and

2. Must have at least 4 years of experience in an administrative position.

Selection of exemplary superintendents included meeting two of the four criteria:

- Recommendation by experienced university professors;
- Recommendation by professional superintendent search organizations;
- Recommendation by the Sonoma or San Mateo County superintendents;
Recommendation by retired superintendents who are active in professional organizations, teaching in doctoral programs, or engaged in leadership training programs.

Recommendations for designating a superintendent as exemplary followed criteria outlined by The Schools Superintendent Association National Superintendent of the Year Program.

Each State Superintendent of the Year is judged on the following criteria:

- **Leadership for Learning**—creativity in successfully meeting the needs of students in his or her school system.
- **Communication**—strength in both personal and organizational communication.
- **Professionalism**—constant improvement of administrative knowledge and skills, while providing professional development opportunities and motivation to others on the education team.
- **Community Involvement**—active participation in local community activities and an understanding of regional, national, and international issues. (The School Superintendents Association, 2019)

**Organization of the Study**

This study is apportioned into five chapters. Chapter I provided an introduction to the study, including background information, the statement of the problem, the significance of the problem, definitions of terms, and delimitations of the study. Chapter II provides a comprehensive review of literature on education systems, including trends and mandates in this system along with the roles of the superintendent and principal; the
understanding of trust in educational organizations; the opportunities for superintendents and principals to build trust; and its impact on student achievement. This chapter concludes with an examination of both effective and dysfunctional teams followed by trust building in meetings. Chapter III focuses on the methodology used in the study. This methodology includes the research design, population, sample, and the criteria for selection of the principals for the study. Chapter IV examines the findings of the study, including a detailed analysis of the data. Chapter V offers the researcher’s interpretation of the data and drawn conclusions based on the analysis of the data and suggested implications for actions and recommendations for further study.
CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter begins with a brief history of educational systems including educational trends and mandates that impact superintendents and principals. As part of reviewing current-day educational trends, this researcher examined the challenges superintendents and principals face in implementing trending educational practices including state and federal mandates and the impact these mandates have on the daily work of school districts. The next section focuses on partnerships in educational systems including the roles and responsibilities of superintendents and principals and the importance of developing and maintaining a collaborative, trusting relationship. The chapter continues with a review of the role of trust in educational environments. Trust models by Covey (2008) and Shaw (1997) are examined as are the facets of trust developed by Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (1998). Highlights of the facets of trust including benevolence, reliability, competency, honesty, and openness are analyzed in relation to trust between superintendents and principals. This researcher further examined the role trust plays on instructional leadership and how superintendents can support their principals in becoming strong instructional leaders. The next section of this literature review continues with the role of leadership team meetings in providing places for district leaders to demonstrate the five facets of trust outlined by Tschannen-Moran and Hoy. This literature review also analyzes both effective and dysfunctional teams. The researcher developed a synthesis matrix that served as a foundation for the review of literature (Appendix A).
Educational Systems

This study focuses on how exemplary superintendents build and maintain trust during leadership team meetings with principals. In order to gain a more in-depth understanding of how school districts are run, it is important to briefly explore educational systems including the trends and mandates in education. Since the time of John Dewey in the late 1800s, the classroom has served as a place where educators can support students to reach their full potential in an environment that actively promotes participation in a democratic society (Steinhardt, 2004). Keeping this environment a place where students can learn and grow and become democratic citizens is not only the responsibility of the teacher but also the responsibility of the principal and superintendent. Dewey’s philosophy of education advocated for students to understand content in the greater context of understanding their role in society.

As teaching professionals who run the day-to-day instructional and operational aspects of their districts and sites, superintendents and principals keep a strong focus on the prioritization of classroom learning (Glass, 1992; Honig et al., 2017; West & Derrington, 2009). As research studies indicate, keeping educational outcomes and goals at the forefront of activities occurring in a school district has become a greater challenge since the advent of state and federal mandates, which have greatly impacted school districts (Carter & Cunningham, 1997; Hesbol, 2005; Holmes, 2012; Yeagley, 2008). Both the superintendent and site principals are challenged to find a balance in meeting the needs of students, staff, and parents while also meeting the increased requirements from state and federal mandates. The primary role of the superintendent and the principal is to serve as instructional leaders, but starting in 2001 with the onset of high-stakes testing
and accountability measures including No Child Left Behind (NCLB), superintendents and principals spent significant time understanding the accountability system while also becoming the de facto public information officers for their schools and districts. With the onset of NCLB, expectations of superintendents and principals have expanded significantly and impacted the daily job responsibilities of both the superintendent and principal (Kellogg, 2017).

**Educational Trends**

As education has taken on a number of changing initiatives since the time of John Dewey, what has not changed is the importance of a trusting relationship between principals and their superintendent with the goal of creating and sustaining learning-rich environments for students. John Dewey believed in a progressive education, through which children would reach their full potential, ultimately promoting and participating in a democratic society (Carpenter, 2013). This goal has remained constant. What has changed is the world in which one lives and the expectations for students when they graduate from public school systems. Wagner (2010) explained that while schools have stayed the same for the last 50 years, the world has changed dramatically. Teachers are faced with changing their practices from one of delivery of content to one whereby teachers are facilitators, helping students learn how to think, solve problems, and become creative problem solvers. In order for teachers to rethink their classroom practices, they need principals who are willing and able to do the same. In order for principals to feel empowered to support these classrooms practices, they need a superintendent who is willing to invest in the success of the principal through a mutual partnership—a partnership that is based on authentic trust (West & Derrington, 2009).
Authentic trust, according to Tschannen-Moran (2014a), “emerges when people have grown to have a deep and abiding trust in one another” (p. 64). This deep and abiding trust allows school and district leaders to engage in the difficult work of embracing new trends and innovations into their daily work. Incorporating innovation into classrooms is at the forefront of thinking in educational institutions across the nation (Grudin, 2018; Gulla, 2017; Kao, 2017) and plays an important role in the professional learning of teachers. District-level staff, principals, and teachers are focusing on how innovation becomes a part of daily lesson planning and learning within classrooms. Teachers are taking more risks and experimenting with new teaching techniques while also providing a greater complexity of learning paths for students (Lucas, 2017). The culture of an organizational system provides an opportunity for this risk-taking to take place. It is this culture that inspires leaders with the support of their superiors to embrace risk-taking (Colquitt, Scott, & LePine, 2007).

In order for a trend to be embedded as part of the school culture, that trend must be embraced by those members of the school community who are doing the work. In similar ways in which teachers and principals are asked to embrace innovation, educators are also being asked to participate in professional learning communities (PLCs). PLCs represent a trend in educational thinking that began in 1999 and still fulfills an important role in schools today. PLCs were defined by DuFour et al. (2006) as an “ongoing process in which educators work collaboratively in recurring cycles of collective inquiry and action research to achieve better results for the students they serve” (p. 26). Through these practices of inquiry, educators reflect on their own practices and set goals for greater student achievement. Each site principal addresses PLCs in ways that make the
most sense to the teachers at the school site. As PLCs take hold, principals begin making decisions regarding the structure and implementation of PLCs at their school sites, and in doing so they need the ongoing support of district-level staff. The expectation is that a synergy develops between school sites and the central office with this synergy leading to greater student achievement (DuFour et al., 2006). According to Herron (2009),

At the district-level, there is a symbiosis or interdependence between principals and the superintendent as the success of the organization depends on both; therefore, each is vulnerable and need to trust the other to move the organization forward effectively. (p. 34)

The level of trust between sites and the central office becomes a critical factor in the successful implementation of initiatives including innovative practices or PLCs. The role of the central office and the superintendent is to remove barriers so that school sites are able to focus on student learning and achievement.

**Educational Mandates**

While it is most effective for principals and their superintendent to have a strong and trusting partnership, barriers can sometimes arise making this partnership a challenge. These barriers include directives from the state and federal governments, which may put superintendents and principals in conflicting roles (Karbula, 2010). Because of state and federal requirements, superintendents must work with both district and site leaders to determine how to address these mandates while keeping student learning and student achievement at the forefront of their thinking. In many cases, there are no clear answers regarding the implementation of policies that can create situations in which superintendents may be forced to make decisions that are potentially in conflict.
with the thinking of the site principal. Over the course of the last 20 years, directives have come down from both the federal and state government including mandates such as NCLB. NCLB often put tremendous pressure on principals to lead their schools in a way that may have not aligned with their philosophical beliefs (Karbula, 2010). The same is true for superintendents leading their districts. Both principals and superintendents have found voice and agency in working with educators across the nation who challenged both the state and federal government on initiatives that they believed were not beneficial to students. Since the time of NCLB, federal and state mandates have focused primarily on academic achievement in mathematics and language arts, forcing principals into difficult positions having to recommend curricular programs, which left some classrooms devoid of subjects such as science and art (Gara, Brouillette, & Farkas, 2018). Research by Sharp and Newman (1990) highlighted that superintendents were also faced with the same challenges but with far-reaching impacts across all schools within their districts. During the time of NCLB, superintendents were put in a position of having to follow federal regulations, which in turn may have not necessarily supported the actions of site leaders (Sharp & Newman, 1990). These challenges not only impacted superintendents, they also impacted principals. Principals face significant challenges by leading from the middle as they work with classroom teachers and with district-level administrators including the superintendent. Educational mandates in the past 20 years have focused on improving student achievement in ways that have proven less than effective (Holmes, 2012; Maleyko, 2011; Viadero, 2007). As state and federal mandates become a part of everyday life in schools, district superintendents and school principals must look for ways to navigate those challenges. To do so, they must consider how those challenges
will be addressed for districtwide students and for students from individual school sites. There is a constant push and pull regarding how mandates are addressed and how curricular programs are implemented. Educational researcher, Michael Fullan (2015) wrote,

> Governments have become less and less effective at leading system change. The old model—prioritize and implement—is no longer suitable. It cannot generate innovation and learning fast enough for the demands of the 21st century. For the latter you need continuous innovation in real time generated and assessed through co-learning laterally within and across classrooms, schools and districts; and hierarchically school to district. (p. 26)

As principals work collaboratively with their superintendents, there is a great opportunity to focus on the demands of teaching and learning in the 21st-century classrooms as opposed to simply adhering to mandates from the state and federal government, which are less effective in making system changes. This focus on teaching and learning has a direct impact on student achievement and on preparing students for their futures (Fullan & Quinn, 2016; Tschannen-Moran, 2014b; Wagner, 2010). According to Hollingworth et al. (2018), “In the US, principals are expected to ensure that initiatives such as the Common Core Curriculum, standards-based grading, and competency-based education are implemented successfully, while also maintaining a positive culture and constructive relationship with teachers” (p. 1015).

As school systems are preparing students for their future, there remains a focus on the importance of graduating students who are able to be fully participating members of society. In the state of California alone, there are over 1,000 school districts and over
10,000 schools serving 6,000,000 students (California Department of Education [CDE], 2018) with each school district preparing students for success at the next level of their learning. In Leadership Teaming: The Superintendent-Principal Relationship, West and Derrington (2009) stated that in preparing students for successful learning experiences, the actions of the principal and superintendent becomes an important factor in successful schools. Understanding the depth of interactions and the development of trust between principals and their superintendent could have a tremendous impact on educational leadership practices across the state of California (Kellogg, 2017). In school districts that have an enrollment of fewer than 5,000 students, the superintendent has a greater opportunity to meet with principals both at the school site and through leadership team meetings. It is during these meetings when superintendents are able to work closely with principals exhibiting benevolence, reliability, competency, honesty, and openness. Research by Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2000) indicated that when these facets of trust come together, they develop a “unitary and coherent concept of trust in schools” (p. 558).

Trust forms the foundation in creating positive and strong relationships between principals and their superintendent (West & Derrington, 2009), and while school districts look vastly different than they did over a century ago, trust continues to be a critical component in the relationship between superintendents and their principals. Adhering to educational mandates will continue to be a part of every school district across the nation. It is the relationship between the educators in the district that will impact the successful implementation of these mandates—relationships that include the five facets of trust including benevolence, reliability, competency, honesty, and openness. Superintendents will continue to have opportunities to work collaboratively with principals on major
education initiatives and mandates while finding ways to build and maintain trust with their site leaders.

**Partnerships in Educational Systems**

In order to fully understand the relationship between superintendents and principals and the role trust plays in this relationship, it is important to understand how this partnership works to increase student achievement in school districts. Research attests to the importance of the superintendent and principal relationship and the impact it has on student achievement (Cudeiro, 2005; Gordon, 2019); higher levels of trust within those relationships generally indicate greater student achievement. Research by Waters and Marzano (2007) also determined that delegating defined autonomy to the principal, including trusting judgment, resulted in increased student achievement.

Conversely, research by Battle (2007) explored the impact of trust in four high schools with below average graduation rates and found that trust levels in underperforming schools were actually higher than comparable schools with higher graduation rates, indicating that there is likely greater collaboration among staff who are addressing students with greater academic challenges. There continues to be a need for balance in determining the level of autonomy granted principals and providing oversight and guidance that lead to increased student achievement.

Meeting the needs of all stakeholders in a district requires teamwork and relationship building between principals and superintendents as they strive to create effective learning environments for students. As described by West and Derrington (2009), “Teamwork by itself is not sufficient to handle the complexities of positively impacting the achievement of all students, but without it a district becomes a collection of
schools, not a team working toward common goals” (p. 12). This type of teamwork becomes an essential part of the work taking place at both the site and district-levels. Researchers Honig et al (2017) outlined trends in education pointing to how central office administrators can work to better support site principals, which positively impacts student achievement. Further research by Waters and Marzano (2007) found,

The superintendent who implements inclusive goal-setting processes that result in board-adopted “non-negotiable goals for achievement and instruction,” who assures that schools align their use of district resources for professional development with district goals, and who monitors and evaluates progress toward goal achievement is fulfilling multiple responsibilities correlated with high levels of achievement. (p. 18)

**Overview of the Roles of the Superintendent and Principals**

As addressed in multiple research studies, the superintendent is the leader of the organization and the person ultimately in charge of the oversight of the entire school district with responsibility for student learning outcomes (Karbula, 2010; Noppe, Yager, Webb, & Sheng, 2013; Weiss, 2017). According to Anderson (2016), “The role of superintendent is vital since the manner in which superintendents choose to lead in their positions profoundly impacts followers within educational organizations” (p. 45). The superintendent sets the tone for the day-to-day interactions within the school district and sets expectations for the behavior of adults within that district. In setting these expectations, the superintendent models what it means to be a strong instructional leader while creating an atmosphere that is conducive to adult learning.
Similar to the role of the superintendent at the district-level, school principals run the day-to-day operations at their school sites, serving as instructional leaders, site managers, and liaisons between their teachers and district-level staff (Cudeiro, 2005). Effective principals model what it means to be an adult learner by investing in professional development while also holding themselves and their teachers accountable for student learning and achievement. Research by Cudeiro (2005), outlined the necessity of principals to be seen as learners while also believing this is important for their own professional learning.

**Role of the Superintendent**

According to Carter and Cunningham (1997), the role of the superintendent of schools is multifaceted and has evolved since the role was first created in the early to mid-19th century. They stated, “Today’s superintendents must be well grounded: from solid pedagogy to financial management, from child growth and development to political acumen, and from organization and group behavior to staff development and student personnel” (p. 3). While aspects of the superintendent’s role have remained the same over time, including general oversight of the schools and personnel, significant changes have occurred as the parameters regarding oversight of public schools has grown increasingly complex (Karbula, 2010). Research by Gemberling, Smith, and Villani (2000) described the role of the superintendent as one that is both managerial and instructional including responsibilities such as (a) analyzing program effectiveness, (b) implementing strategic plan goals and initiatives, (c) collaboratively working with the board of education, (d) supporting change initiatives in the district by monitoring and ensuring implementation, and (e) following board policies and procedures. While
this role of the superintendent is directly aligned to the work of the school board, superintendents are also expected to successfully master the managerial aspects of the district. According to Carter and Cunningham (1997), in the mid-20th century, the superintendent’s role shifted from “master educator” to “expert manager.” Glass (2007) noted that superintendents are being evaluated for their ability in “leading and managing personnel, fiscal resources, facilities, community relations, fostering a positive school/district climate and relating effectively with the board” (p. 3).

One of the greatest challenges facing superintendents is striking a balance between all the competing demands of the job while focusing on the time needed to be an effective instructional leader (Cudeiro, 2005). In taking care of daily responsibilities, superintendents spend time analyzing and disseminating information, planning for board meetings, making personnel decisions, budgeting, resolving conflicts, addressing pressing issues, and supervising others (Hesbol, 2005). In addition, superintendents are now faced with the responsibilities of having secure campuses along with regular safety drills focused on possible active shooters on their campuses. As discussed by Noelle Ellerson Ng, associate executive director of policy and advocacy at the School Superintendents Association, “Superintendents are balancing their obligation to educate their students and support their community and students’ first amendment rights with their professional and educational responsibility to consistently and equitably enforce state and local laws and policies” (Camera, 2018, p. 2). The pressure on the superintendent from both parents in the district and community members has increased exponentially in just the last 2 years as have school shootings across the nation.
While superintendents focus on the safety aspects of running a school district, there is also pressure placed on them to focus on instructional leadership. According to Honig et al. (2017), while addressing the managerial requirements of the job, superintendents should put instructional leadership as a top priority in the work they do. Changing instructional practices now encompass agile learning spaces, technology-rich classrooms, and expectations for innovation across the district (Mau, 2010). The rate of change that can be sustained in organizations is a factor that superintendents assess as they make a determination involving the implementation of new ideas and initiatives. As Fullan and Quinn (2016) asserted,

Great leaders read situations and people. They build strong relationship and seek feedback from all sources. These attributes give them insight into when to push or be assertive and when they need to draw people in or follow. The best leaders use push and pull in combination. (p. 33)

Role of the Principal

While the primary job of the school principal is instructional leadership, which includes visiting classrooms, assessing instruction, offering feedback, and supporting teachers, the role of the principal also includes management of the school site and being the point of contact for parents and members of the community (Hollingworth et al., 2018). According to the National Policy Board for Educational Administration (2015), administrators including site principals have varied and complex roles and responsibilities including the academic success and well-being of every students by (a) developing and advocating for high-quality education; (b) acting ethically according to professional norms; (c) striving for equity of educational opportunity and culturally
responsive practices; (d) developing and supporting rigorous systems of curriculum, instruction, and assessment; (e) cultivating an inclusive, caring, and supportive school community; (f) developing professional capacity and practice of school personnel; (g) fostering a professional community of teachers and staff; (h) engaging families and community members; (i) managing school operations and resources; and (j) acting as an agent of continuous improvement. These responsibilities are in addition to the reporting responsibilities of the principal to district office staff including the superintendent.

The principal is charged with “leading from the middle” working closely with a multitude of stakeholders in leading initiatives that result in successful outcomes for students. Research on school-site leadership recognizes that it is essential for principals to build trusting relationships with their teachers, staff, and parents in order to create successful schools (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Karbula, 2010), which is complex, and at times, political. Tschannen-Moran (2001) stated, “The nature of the interdependence between principals, teachers, students, and parents is such that each of the facets has shown to make significant contribution to judgments of trust” (p. 314).

According to Blase and Blase (2001), giving teachers the room to explore, trying new practices in their classrooms, and giving them room to make mistakes builds trust between principals and their teachers. Building this kind of relational trust allows teachers to try new teaching strategies in their classrooms without fear of failure. In serving as an instructional leader, principals must make determinations regarding the implementation of curricular programs at their school sites, which also includes the introduction of new forms of technology in every classroom (Irish, 2018; Selwyn, Nemorin, Bulfin, & Johnson, 2017). Instruction across the grade levels is changing
dramatically with the onset of one-to-one devices. The challenge facing many school
districts and more specifically principals is how to provide the best professional learning
opportunities for teachers who may be unfamiliar with new technology. According to
Hutchinson and Woodward (2018), professional development must include models that
explain the application of technology along with context driving instruction. Principals
must also assure that multiple modes of teacher engagement are a part of this one-to-one
device training. In addition to teachers learning this new technology, expectations are
changing for principals as well. As noted by Friedman and Mandelbaum (2012), “With
the world getting more hyper-connected all the time, maintaining the American dream
will require learning, working, producing, relearning, and innovating twice as hard, twice
as fast, twice as often and twice as much” (p. 111). This American dream begins in every
classroom with expectations for student success directly tied to the classroom teacher and
the school principal.

The world of technology is changing at an exponential rate. Schools across the
country continue to play catch-up with the changing world of technology, and this is felt
by principals who are working to manage job expectations. The world of business and
technology is moving so quickly that educational systems are falling further and further
behind (Friedman & Mandelbaum, 2012). Principals are charged with managing these
changes while continuing to have trusting relationships with their teachers. A study by
Blake and MacNeil (1998) researching how trust is built in schools found that principals
who were knowledgeable, approachable, and flexible, who analyzed problems
effectively, and used power appropriately built the highest levels of trust with their
teachers.
Trust in Educational Environments

A key factor in finding ways to navigate challenges within a school system is through building trust with members of the organization. When principals look to their superintendent as a collaborative partner to solve complex problems, they do so because they trust the superintendent as someone who is looking out for the best interest of the principal, the school site, and the district. According to West and Derrington (2009), “A trusting team collaborates, aligns activity for a more effective outcome, and extends the leadership of the superintendent into the schools” (p. 53). In teaming, both principals and superintendents must take on the role of “lead learner” with knowledge and enthusiasm if they want to create successful schools and learning environments (Fullan & Quinn, 2016).

While successful schools and learning environments look significantly different than business environments, educational leadership does mirror a corporate model of governance and management where superintendents serve as educational leaders and managers. As described by Glass (2005), “The leadership-management mix makes the superintendent’s position an anomaly compared to top executives in most organizations. Leadership and management are usually discrete functions in the private sector, performed by separate executives with different personality types and training” (p. 34). Historically, superintendents focused on the daily operations of the school district, working to effectively manage fiscal, physical, and personnel resources, but in current educational settings, the superintendent is expected to serve as the visionary of the district with strong communication skills and political savvy (Glass, 2005). In serving as a visionary of the school district, superintendents are charged with laying the foundations
for trust throughout the organization. Research studies affirm the importance of superintendents building trust in the organization and the impact this trust has on district culture (Hatchel, 2013; Herron, 2009; Karbula, 2010). This trust is built by genuinely listening to members of the organization without preconceived ideas or solutions. Leaders who demonstrate a true interest in the feedback and opinions of those they serve will have greater success in meeting educational outcomes for the students in their care (Karbula, 2010). In educational settings, the leader is only as strong as those who will follow them, and it is difficult for educators to follow the leader of the organization if that leader does not demonstrate authentic concern. According to Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2000), research demonstrates that “trust is recognized as a vital element in well-functioning organizations. Trust is necessary for effective cooperation and communication, the foundations for cohesive and productive relationships in organizations” (p. 549).

In working toward creating a successful collaborative environment, principals and their superintendent have an opportunity to build a trusting relationship through daily or weekly interactions. Trust is a complex concept that forms the foundations of all human interactions and one that is of critical importance in the school environment (Hoy & Kupersmith, 1985). Definitions of trust are multifaceted and complex depending on the interacting parties. According to Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2000), “Trust is one party’s willingness to be vulnerable to another party based on the confidence that the latter party is (a) benevolent, (b) reliable, (c) competent, (d) honest, and (e) open” (p. 556).
Trust Between Superintendents and Principals

The roles of both superintendents and principals are complex and challenging, and the opportunity to spend time on developing trusting relationships can be lost to less important but sometimes more immediate needs. In becoming an effective leader, superintendents must be able to communicate well with all constituents, demonstrate exceptional instructional leadership skills, be open-minded and willing to demonstrate vulnerability, and develop rapport with principals through trust-building actions and activities (Kellogg, 2017). When superintendents focus their practices on these characteristics, there is a greater opportunity for strong rapport development with educators throughout the school district, and therefore, there is a greater opportunity to impact change in the organization. Research by Hatchel (2013) concluded that superintendents who build relationships and understand the importance of trust as a significant factor in this relationship building create strong working relationships. According to West and Derrington (2009), “Interpersonal trust is the glue of day-to-day life in a leadership team. A superintendent and the principals must understand and trust each other at the most fundamental level because the work is significant, profound and complex” (p. 59).

As superintendents gain experience in their roles, they become more familiar with the needs of site principals, building both social capital and trust. Growth as a superintendent includes learning how to model and demonstrate instructional leadership skills and being open-minded regarding feedback from principals. Similarly, when superintendents prioritize the time to have meaningful conversations with principals, they have an opportunity to develop effective relationships that build trust. Kellogg (2017)
explained that superintendents who exhibit open, honest, and transparent communication are most likely to develop a trusting relationship with principals, thereby demonstrating actions that are replicable at the school site. In building positive relationships with principals through open and honest conversations, superintendents are creating social capital for use when superintendents need to make difficult decisions that could erode trust with their stakeholders. Research by Ripley et al. (2013) discussed the critically important relationships between superintendents and stakeholders, including principals as they begin developing trust and social capital in their school districts. As social and relational capital grows, leaders are more willing to exhibit vulnerability, which is a measure of trust. In order for trust to be built, leaders must be willing to embrace vulnerability and commit to demonstrating benevolence, reliability, competency, honesty, and openness during social exchanges with others (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000). Vulnerability allows both principals and their superintendents to build trust in their relationship, which in turn creates opportunities for open and honest conversations to take place. According to a meta-analysis of over 4 decades of studies on trust, Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2000) described reoccurring themes that emerge regardless of the context of the research. These themes come together to develop a “unitary and coherent concept of trust in schools” (p. 558), which superintendents can use to build trust with site leaders. Having both social capital and trust built with principals is especially important during times of change or transition within the school district. Similar to the process of building social capital, trust reduces uncertainty and has been linked to effective operations and increased student achievement (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999).
There is a fine balance in the relationship between superintendents and their principals when difficult decisions must be made in the best interest of the students as this has become a part of the everyday work of the superintendent and principal. There is a partnership between these educational leaders that can be pushed at times when the superintendent is trying to implement change, which may or may not align with the principal’s vision of instructional leadership. Wagner (2010) stated that educational systems are “held together through compliance to traditional bureaucratic authority—which is more characteristic of yesteryear’s blue collar assembly lines than of the way in which most work is organized today” (p. 155). This type of bureaucratic system is one that is common in school districts but not effective. Wagner (2010) explained that “teachers cannot figure out all by themselves how to get all students to be proficient, and administrators, working alone, do not know how to create a system where all their teachers improve continuously. Indeed, no one could solve these problems, working alone” (p. 157). With this being the case, the need for collaboration between teachers, their principal, and the superintendent becomes critical as districts navigate changing educational environments. No longer is the model of top-down leadership an effective model for change (Fullan, 2003). Rather, the model is one where superintendents and principals are able to work collaboratively, even faced with the need to make difficult decisions in which the superintendent and principal may disagree.

**Trust Between Principals and Teachers**

While there are significant attributes that principals value in superintendents, of great importance is sustaining the relationship of trust built on open, honest, and transparent communication (Kellogg, 2017). A similar relationship exists between
principals and the educators in their schools. Research from Battle (2007) demonstrated that principals believe that trust is the foundation for effective schools based on the importance of positive relationships, open communication, and valuing people in the schools.

As trusting relationships grow, leaders are more willing to participate in risk-taking projects and actions with the end goal of increasing student achievement (West & Derrington, 2009). When educational organizations as a whole have a high level of trust between leaders, there are higher levels of positive change in the schools that may ultimately have an impact on increased student achievement (Ripley et al., 2013).

**Teacher Trust and Student Achievement**

As trust builds throughout the school, the entire school community benefits (Van Maele, Forsyth, & Van Houtte, 2014). When there is a culture of trust and high expectations for student learning, students will rise to the occasion, setting similarly high expectations for themselves. School leadership matters, and it is a key factor in managing school culture and shaping organizational performance and functioning (Hollingworth et al., 2018). Principals who lead by building relationships and modeling trust are more likely to see these behaviors modeled by teachers in their classroom.

According to Tschannen-Moran (2014b), “When teachers trust their students, and when they believe that their students are respectful, honest, reliable, open, and competent, they are more likely to create a learning environment that facilitates academic success” (p. 157). The body of literature on trust in the classroom and its correlation to student achievement indicates that classrooms with reciprocal trust between teachers and students are classrooms where students will have the greatest gains in student achievement (Bryk
& Schneider, 2002; K. E. Harvey, 2013; Tschannen-Moran, 2014a). Students’ trust in their teachers has also been well researched indicating that students trust in their teacher is based on perceptions of a teacher’s benevolence, reliability, competency, honesty, and openness (K. E. Harvey, 2013; Tschannen-Moran, 2014a; Van Maele et al., 2014). Students who feel safe in their classrooms are more willing to take the risks necessary to learn new skills and are more willing to invest in their own learning (Tschannen-Moran, 2014b).

**Trust and Instructional Leadership**

In addition to the time spent on the managerial portion of overseeing a school district or a school site, superintendents and principals are charged with being exceptional instructional leaders. Research on successful instructional leadership indicates that the development of trust between leaders is one of the key factors in developing strong instructional leadership practices (Robinson, 2010; Tschannen-Moran, 2014a; West & Derrington, 2009). Robinson (2010) stated, “Instructional leadership refers to those sets of leadership practices that involve the planning, evaluation, coordination, and improvement of teaching and learning” (p. 3). This role of instructional leader is the most critical when it comes to student achievement. Instructional leadership focuses on the critical aspects of teaching and learning so that powerful learning experiences take place in every classroom for every student (Silverman, 2018). Research is clear regarding the critical nature of strong instructional leadership and the impact it has on student learning (Johnson, 2008; Robinson, 2010; West & Derrington, 2009).

In addition to serving as the “lead learner” in the school district, superintendents must utilize strong instructional leadership skills in addition to demonstrating trust,
building empathy, and modeling professional learning (Honig et al., 2017).

Environments where trust is present allow principals and superintendents to engage in the difficult work of defining and fully understanding instructional leadership. As noted by Fullan (2003), leadership is critical to successful organizational functioning. One of the most critical roles of the superintendent in creating a school district that is focused on effective instructional leadership is to serve school sites and mentor principals (Honig et al., 2017). While Fullan’s work has been broadly cited, other researchers have also contributed to the literature surrounding how a superintendent’s leadership skills contribute to the overall organizational culture of the district. Creating a district culture that has the underpinnings of trust allows for greater risk-taking and innovation by all educators. Studies by Ogawa and Bossert (1995) and Pounder, Ogawa, and Adams (1995) demonstrated that effective leaders understand the culture of their organization and empower others to take on leadership roles, which in turn creates a positive culture. It is this positive culture that allows for open and honest conversations that are the underpinnings of trust. According to Powers (1994), in order to have an effective administrative team, superintendents must show a high level of concern for their site leaders while also paying attention to the overall goals of the organization. Effective administrative teams also create environments where team members are able to express thoughts and feelings without fear, communicate honestly, look for ways to help each other, and feel listened to and valued for their contributions (West & Derrington, 2009).

As superintendents take on the role of the instructional leader of the district, school principals are the instructional leader at their school sites and set the tone and expectations for learning. Creating a positive school culture allows principals to move
initiatives forward and is based on principals knowing their staff well, cultivating trust and engaging in purposeful communication (Hollingworth et al., 2018). This positive school culture based on cultivating trust allows the principal to focus on instructional leadership strategies that can improve student achievement. Positive school cultures lead to environments where educators share a common vision and demonstrate collegiality with a focus on student learning and achievement (Peterson & Deal, 1998). As superintendents model these behaviors including trust building for principals, principals in turn can model these behaviors for teachers and teachers can model the same for their students.

Superintendents and Principal Leadership

Similar to the role of superintendents, the role of the principal has changed dramatically over the course of the last 20 years. As noted by Neumerski et al. (2018),

The expectation that principals should be instructional leaders is now deeply engrained in our understanding of effective school leadership. Managing the daily operations of their schools is insufficient; present-day principals are expected to engage closely with teaching and learning. (p. 270)

Principals are required to be both site managers and instructional leaders and look to their superintendent for direction and support. Research studies indicate that in becoming an instructional leader, principals must develop a strong and trusting relationship with their teachers (Hoy & Kupersmith, 1985; Pfeifer & Polek, 2007; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 1998). Effective principals take on the role of instructional leader at their school sites, utilizing support from district-level staff (Heller, 2018). This support becomes a critical factor in supporting principals who take on challenging initiatives. Principals are
constantly faced with balancing demands from school sites and district offices. In a study by Honig et al. (2017), it was discovered that in order to help principals work through such challenges effectively, district staff must take the time to work with principals to develop the rapport that makes such support meaningful to principals. Additional research conducted by West and Derrington (2009) reiterated the importance of the partnership between principals and their superintendent focused on trust and mutual respect: “No matter how knowledgeable, dynamic, or influential a superintendent or principal may be individually, neither can operate independently. Job responsibilities are great and working relationships are intricately interwoven. Both superintendent and principal success lie in a team approach” (p. 105).

**Effective Teams**

Effective teams and by extension effective team meetings depend on mutual trust between participants. T. Harvey and Drolet (2006) described this mutual trust by outlining the following five conditions in building trusting team relationships:

1. **Interdependence:** Mutual two-way interactions that benefit both participants.
2. **Consistency:** Saying what you mean and doing what you say. Holding an expectation that your word matters and you can be counted on to follow through on promises.
3. **Honesty:** Being honest in all interactions and conversations. Telling the truth in all situations and interactions.
4. **Affability:** Being someone who is well liked and easy to be around.
5. **Extension of trust:** Give trust and get trust. Be willing to extend trust to those on your team. Keeping an open mind and offering trust to those around you.
Superintendents have the opportunity to create these conditions each time they hold district-level leadership team meetings. District-level leadership team meetings provide a regular opportunity for superintendents to demonstrate their knowledge of curricular content, their commitment to support site administrators, their belief in opportunities for shared leadership, and their strong understanding of exemplary instructional practices. Superintendents, by the nature of their work, do serve as the decision-maker and architect of district-level meeting agendas, and these agendas allow for discussion of complex topics such as instructional leadership and also offer multiple opportunities to build mutual trust. This foundation of mutual trust is essential in the building of effective teams (T. Harvey & Drolet, 2006).

**Dysfunctional Teams**

When trust is lacking, teams can become dysfunctional. Research by Lencioni (2002) concluded that the five dysfunctions of a team begin with (a) absence of trust, (b) fear of conflict, (c) lack of commitment, (d) avoidance of accountably, and (e) inattention to results. In an environment where trust is absent, team members may conceal their weaknesses, hesitate to ask for help, hesitate to offer help, jump to conclusions, fail to recognize another’s skills or expertise, waste time managing their behaviors for effect, hold grudges, or dread meeting (Lencioni, 2002). Meetings where the leaders of the group demonstrate vulnerability are the most important action that can be taken to overcome the absence of trust in team meetings.

Over the course of each school year, principals and their superintendent, along with district-level administrators, hold team meetings on a regular basis. This is the time and place where superintendents, district-level staff, and principals come together to
work collaboratively toward the achievement of district goals. In smaller-sized districts (enrollment up to 5,000 students), superintendents commonly develop the agenda and coordinate the activities of these meetings. The foundations for the effectiveness of these meetings depends on the principals and superintendent having a level of trust that allows for vulnerability to discuss difficult topics in addition to having open and honest conversations. Meetings in organizations can be more than a tool for disseminating information and improving the effectiveness of the organization, and they can also serve as windows into the employees’ experiences (J. A. Allen et al., 2015). It is these shared experiences that allow for relationship building to take place in the organization. Meetings can also raise individuals and teams to higher levels of achievement and success depending on the meeting structures and design. As authors Odermatt, König, and Kleinmann (2015) discussed, low quality meetings are the result of poor planning and poorly facilitated meetings. As the leader of team meetings, the superintendent is the person who plans and facilitates these meetings, which means that they must have exemplary planning and strong facilitation skills in addition to content-relevant topics in order for meetings to run efficiently and effectively. A study by Lesley (2012) analyzing the effectiveness of principals’ time spent on off-site meetings found that districts must examine (a) the amount of time principals are being asked to leave their sites, (b) the content of the meeting to ensure that it promotes the characteristics of effective leadership, and (c) the structure of the meeting so that it reflects the philosophy of meaningful adult learning. It is the responsibility of district-level staff to provide meeting content that supports the professional learning of principals in an atmosphere where professional learning can take place (Lesley, 2012).
Trust Building and Leadership Team Meetings

Similar to site faculty meetings, leadership team meetings serve as a venue where staff come together to do the work of the district. According to Jennings (2007), “meetings should not just serve as venues for transmission of information to staff; they should fulfill the following purposes: (a) to build relationships between staff members, (b) to focus on professional learning, and (c) to solve problems and make decisions” (p. 6). A quality meeting will also include the role of facilitator, timekeeper, note taker, and process checker so that the meeting can be run smoothly, valuing the time of all participants. In addition to the meeting purpose and the roles of participants, quality meetings also include a statement of the overall purpose of the meeting, time frame for the meeting, location of the meeting, and any special resources or advanced preparation that is needed by the participants (Jennings, 2007).

Authentic Trust Building

During these leadership team meetings, trust can be gained by actions and interactions modeled by the superintendent. According to research by Shaw (1997), “Trust must be treated as a structural and cultural characteristic of organizations” (p. xiii). This organizational trust influences performance by empowering individuals, teams, and groups to act on a wide range of strategic objectives; to work interdependently in order to realize a common goal; to share information, to take necessary risks, and deal effectively with adversity; and to create mutual trust with colleagues.

The Shaw (1997) framework for trust building includes achieving results by following through on commitments, acting with integrity by behaving in a consistent manner, and demonstrating concern by respecting the well-being of others. Similarly,
effectiveness of district operations depends on the principals and superintendent having a level of trust that allows for vulnerability when discussing difficult topics that require holding open and honest conversations (Hatchel, 2013). According to Tschannen-Moran (2014a), fostering trust is complicated and multifaceted: “Trust takes root as two parties gain experience and become able to predict how the other is likely to behave in a given situation, and as they develop a sense of care for one another and the relationship” (p. 69).

**Leaders Modeling Trust Building**

Leadership team meetings present an opportunity for trust-building behaviors to be modeled by superintendents. Research by Lencioni (2002) concluded that “trust lies at the heart of a functioning, cohesive team. Without it, teamwork is all but impossible” (p. 195). It is this trust that allows team members to take risks, ask for help, focus time and energy on important topics, and look forward to meetings and other opportunities to work as a group (Lencioni, 2002). Superintendents who are able to build trusting relationships in their districts will build a culture where benevolence, reliability, competency, honesty, and openness are the expected norms for interactions between staff members. Research by Tschannen-Moran (2014a) described key points regarding trust and its importance to an educational organization. It noted school leaders who have the trust of their community are more likely to be successful in creating a productive learning environment. Just as principals lead their teachers, superintendents lead their principals in building learning communities where trust is the foundation of a productive learning culture.
School districts not only expect students to achieve at high levels, they also expect the same from the adults in their organizations. Without trust, leaders will struggle in their attempts to create educational environments that address the challenging goals set for them by district and community stakeholders. It is the development of authentic trust that emerges when people “have a deep and abiding trust in one another” (Tschannen-Moran, 2014a, p. 64). This is the level of trust that is needed between principals and their superintendent in order to have effective school and district partnerships. White, Harvey, and Kemper (2007) indicated that when individuals extend trust and act in a trustworthy fashion, they are more likely to receive trust in return, and those who exhibit interdependence of behavior, consistency of actions and words, honesty, affability, and extension of trust to others will create an environment where trust can grow and flourish.

Leadership team meetings provide the optimal setting for authentic trust building. These meetings are the opportune place where both principals and superintendents alike can work to accomplish the goals of the district. As seminal author Helen Schwartzman (1989) explained, “Meetings may be the form that generates and maintains the organization as an entity and one that also influences the work and goals of individuals and an organization or community in ways that may be totally unanticipated and unintended” (p. 86). While there is an opportunity to work on the important work of the district including addressing district, site, and individual goals, meeting at this level can devolve into a time when the superintendent mistakenly focuses most of the meeting time on the managerial aspects of the district rather than initiating actions that will enhance instructional and educational leadership opportunities.
It would be beneficial for all educational leaders, starting with the superintendent as the lead learner, to understand what they can do to build and maintain trust. Using the facets of trust developed by Tschannen-Moran and Hoy, superintendents can develop strategies to model benevolence, demonstrate competency, and create an atmosphere that welcomes and supports reliability, honesty, and openness. As superintendents better understand the needs of their principals in developing a trusting relationship, they will grow into the leaders whom both students and educators deserve.

**Summary**

This review of literature examined the changing educational system through the lens of educational trends and mandates. Research indicated that while there have been substantial changes in educational practices over the last 20 years that have had a direct impact on schools and districts, what has not changed is the important role trust plays in the superintendent and principal relationship. The literature also highlighted the changing role of the superintendent, which includes complex managerial tasks and serving as the instructional leader of the school district. Additionally, the literature outlined the changing role of principals, which includes addressing a more hyperconnected learning environment for both teachers and students.

The review of literature demonstrated the important role trust plays in an educational setting as well as a business setting and the similarities regarding the necessity of trust for effective cooperation and communication as the foundation for productive relationships in organizations. According to Shaw (1997), trust building includes achieving results, following through on commitments, and acting with integrity. Expanding on the concept of trust in organizations, the literature outlined the importance of trust in building relationships between superintendents and principals, principals and
teachers, and ultimately the trust relationship between teacher and students. When reciprocal trust based on benevolence, reliability, competency, honesty, and openness exists in classrooms, students have the greatest gains in achievement.

This review of literature also found that the leadership skills of the superintendent had a direct impact on building positive school culture at school sites based on cultivating trust with the principal. Superintendents serve as the instructional leader in the school district, and along with this responsibility comes the importance of building partnerships with principals based on mutual trust and respect. This review of literature concluded that building trusting teams requires interdependence, consistency, honesty, affability, and extension of trust. Research also concludes that meetings influence the work and goals of both the individual and the organization.

The intention of this study was to understand the lived experiences of principals in identifying factors that served to build and maintain trust with their superintendent during leadership team meetings and to extrapolate those factors to populations of administrators across the state of California.
CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Overview

Trust plays a role in every relationship and forms the foundation of the relationship between principals and their superintendent. The relationship between these two district leaders is symbiotic in that each person plays a critical role in the overall successful functioning of a school district. The roles of the principal and of the superintendent are on display when district principals, upper level management, and the superintendent come together in leadership team meetings where trust can be modeled through agenda development, planned activities, and structured conversations. This study focused on how educators in leadership roles perceive a phenomenon of building and maintaining trust and more specifically how principals perceive trust, describe it, and make sense of it. Chapter I provided an overview of the study. Chapter II reviewed the research related to principal relationships, trust in organizations, and the functioning of leadership team meetings. Chapter III presents the methodology utilized to conduct the study by describing the qualitative use of phenomenology to explore the lived experiences of principals during leadership team meetings. The remainder of Chapter III reviews the research design, population, sample, instrumentation, data collection, data analysis, limitations to the study, and a summary of the chapter’s critical points.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to identify and describe behaviors exemplary superintendents practice during leadership team meetings that build and maintain trust with their principals based on the facets of trust defined by Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (benevolence, reliability, competency, honesty, and openness).
Research Central Question

The research central question for this study was, “What behaviors do exemplary superintendents practice that build and maintain trust, as experienced by principals during leadership team meetings, based on the facet of trust described by Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (benevolence, reliability, competency, honesty, and openness)?”

Research Subquestions

Sub RQ1: What behaviors do exemplary superintendents practice during leadership team meetings that build and maintain trust, as experienced by principals, based on benevolence?

Sub RQ2: What behaviors do exemplary superintendents practice during leadership team meetings that build and maintain trust, as experienced by principals, based on reliability?

Sub RQ3: What behaviors do exemplary superintendents practice during leadership team meetings that build and maintain trust, as experienced by principals, based on competency?

Sub RQ4: What behaviors do exemplary superintendents practice during leadership team meetings that build and maintain trust, as experienced by principals, based on honesty?

Sub RQ5: What behaviors do exemplary superintendents practice during leadership team meetings that build and maintain trust, as experienced by principals, based on openness?
Research Design

In order to gain a deeper understanding regarding how trust is built and maintained, it was necessary to collect narrative, information-rich stories from the field. For this study, the primary sources of data collection were semistructured interviews. Given the nature of the need for in-depth interviews, a qualitative approach was considered to be most appropriate.

Interviews formed the foundation of this study, providing, as Creswell (2014) described, “indirect information filtered through the views of the interviewees” (p. 118). In-depth interviews allowed principals to share their perceptions, opinions, and feelings regarding the factors that build and maintain trust with their superintendent. Interviews were semistructured so that all participants were asked a similar series of questions including some standardized questions. Semistructured interviews allowed the researcher to adapt the interview and ask appropriate follow-up questions and, in this case, in alignment with the research question and the five sub-research questions (Appendix B).

The goal of this study was for respondents to tell their stories, providing semistructured feedback. In reviewing and analyzing the many methods of qualitative research including ethnographic inquiry, grounded theory, and heuristic inquiry, phenomenology was identified as the most appropriate method for this research based on the specific needs of the study.

Phenomenology

The underpinning of this study was focused on investigating the experiences of principals during leadership team meetings as a unique phenomenon. Because this study involves an exploration into the perceptions of principals in building and maintaining
trust with their superintendent, the research approach chosen fits descriptions of phenomenology. This method, as described by Patton (2015), answers the core question: “What is the meaning, structure, and essence of the lived experience of this phenomenon for this person or group of people?” (p. 98). McMillan and Schumacher (2014) asserted that the “aim of phenomenology is to transform lived experience into a description of its essence,” allowing for reflection and analysis” (p. 24), which formed the basis of this study. In keeping with the protocol of phenomenological research, steps were taken to ensure that the study entails the necessary rigor that a phenomenological method demands.

This type of research method is appropriate for this study as this approach utilizes methods of inquiry that include interviews to understand the lived experiences and thus multiple perspectives of the participants. Because this study focused on lived experiences of the study participants, it would therefore make the most sense to conduct interviews in the environments where the respondents are participating in this shared experience. While this is optimal, it may not always be practical, so options for video-conferencing were also considered. Working with the interviewees in their actual working environment allowed the researcher to more easily gain an understanding of the interviewees’ thoughts and lived experiences (Creswell, 2014).

**Population**

Population, as described by Roberts (2010), “is a group of elements or cases, whether individuals, objects, or events, that confirm to a specific criteria and to which we intend to generalize the results of the research” (p. 29). This study investigated the perceptions of principals on how exemplary superintendents build and maintain trust
during leadership team meetings. The criteria for serving as a principal in the state of California includes holding a valid California teaching credential; completing a California Teaching Commission administrator preparation program, which may include exemptions based on certain experience and/or examination requirements; and holding either a Preliminary or Clear Administrative Services Credential (Teaching Certification, 2019). The population for this study included the approximate 9,700 principals in California, as indicated by CDE (2018), who serve public schools.

**Target Population**

A target population for a study is the entire set of individuals chosen from the overall population for which the study data are to be used to make inferences. The target population defines the population to which the findings are meant to be generalized. It is important that target populations are clearly identified for the purposes of the research study (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). It is typically not feasible, because of time or cost constraints, to study large groups; therefore, the researcher chose population samples from within a larger group. The target population is identified as principals in Sonoma and San Mateo Counties who work in an elementary school district with fewer than 5,000 students with a superintendent who has been identified as exemplary. This included 6 districts with 39 principals (CDE, 2018).

Once the criteria were established identifying the target population, the researcher used established criteria for selecting exemplary superintendents. Selection included meeting two of the four criteria:

- Recommendation by experienced university professors;
- Recommendation by professional superintendent search organizations;
• Recommendation by the Sonoma or San Mateo County superintendents;

• Recommendation by retired superintendents who are active in professional organizations, teaching in doctoral programs, or engaged in leadership training programs.

Recommendations for designating a superintendent as exemplary followed criteria outlined by The Schools Superintendent Association National Superintendent of the Year Program.

Each State Superintendent of the Year is judged on the following criteria:

• **Leadership for Learning**—creativity in successfully meeting the needs of students in his or her school system.

• **Communication**—strength in both personal and organizational communication.

• **Professionalism**—constant improvement of administrative knowledge and skills, while providing professional development opportunities and motivation to others on the education team.

• **Community Involvement**—active participation in local community activities and an understanding of regional, national, and international issues. (The School Superintendents Association, 2019)

**Sample**

McMillan and Schumacher (2014) defined the sample as a group of individuals within the target population from whom data was collected. The number of principals from elementary school districts in Sonoma and San Mateo Counties with an enrollment of fewer than 5,000 students is approximately 39 principals representing 6 districts,
which was the target population of this study. The sample of this study included 16 of
the 39 principals from Sonoma and San Mateo Counties with exemplary superintendents
representing a minimum of six different school districts representing Sonoma and San
Mateo Counties.

**Sampling Procedure**

In qualitative research, there are many sampling procedures. For this study,
purposeful sampling was considered and adopted. Initially, respondents for interviews
were identified through purposeful sampling. Purposeful sampling is defined by Patton
(2015) as the strategic selection of “information-rich cases to study, cases that by their
nature and substance will illuminate the inquiry question being investigated” (p. 215).
McMillan and Schumacher (2014) indicated that purposeful sampling is pertinent when
the researcher chooses participants who have information that is relevant to the subject
and representative of the broad topic of study. For this study, criteria were
predetermined, and the selection of participants was based on meeting all of the following
criteria:

- Must be a principal working in an elementary school district with an enrollment of less
  than 5,000 students in Sonoma or San Mateo Counties;
- Must have at least 2 years of experience serving as a principal with the same
  exemplary superintendent, and;
- Must have served at least 4 years in an administrative position.

The second sampling procedure is snowball sampling. Snowball sampling
allowed the researcher to start with information-rich interviewees who could provide
additional contacts who could provide differing and/or confirming perspectives (Patton,
2015) and were used as a secondary method for securing interviewees. Because of the nature of this study, which had a focus on leadership team meetings that range in degrees of confidentiality, it was likely that respondents might not have been open to participating. As such, using snowball sampling was appropriate because a reference by a colleague who shared similar concerns may have lowered any anxiety and inhibition to participate. At the end of each interview, the researcher asked the respondent for references and asked permission for the respondent to reach out and inform potential future respondents of the reference.

**Instrumentation**

This section discusses the tools that were used in conducting this phenomenological study including the researcher as the primary instrument of this study, and the semistructured interview process related to building trust in organizations.

**Researcher as an Instrument**

The researcher in this study designed the interview questions, interviewed the respondents, and coded the data and thus, is the main instrument of the study. Because the researcher served as the primary instrument of the study, this approach can be criticized because of subjectivity and unscientific inquiry. The researcher’s proximity to the data and subjective judgments about the data created challenges in regard to the reliability and validity of the research (Patton, 2015). In addressing this challenge, Patton (2015) emphasized the importance of mindfulness during the interview process, which “creates the opening to empathy and is intrinsically nonjudgmental” (p. 60).

According to McMillan and Schumacher (2014), qualitative research takes a personal approach; in this type of research, the researcher is the instrument of inquiry.
The study utilized semistructured interviews to obtain data on the perspectives of principals regarding the factors that build and maintain trust with their superintendent during leadership team meetings. Using the researcher as the instrument in this study allowed for richness of description—a hallmark of qualitative research (Creswell, 2014; McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). The narrative descriptions made available through the semistructured interviews helped to provide a detailed view of the lived experiences of the subjects who participated in the study.

This researcher brings certain biases to this study, having previously served as a principal for 6 years and currently finishing year 10 serving as a superintendent. Creswell (2014) noted that a “validity procedure is for researchers to self-disclose their assumptions, beliefs, and biases. This is the process whereby researchers report on personal beliefs, values, and biases that may shape their inquiry” (p. 127). Attention needed to be paid to these biases as the expert was reviewing the recorded interview.

**Interview Questions**

Another instrument of this study is the interview questions. This instrument was developed through alignment with the Tschannen-Moran and Hoy trust construct based on benevolence, reliability, competency, honesty, and openness (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000). For example, using the research subquestion, “According to research by Tschannen-Moran, benevolence is one of the five facets of trust. Benevolence is defined as concern for others including kindness. Are there examples of how your superintendent models benevolence during your leadership team meetings?” required the researcher to dig deeper into understanding how superintendents demonstrate kindness and caring as an aspect of the district meetings. As such, the interview question, “How does your
superintendent exhibit benevolence during leadership team meetings?” was developed. This type of question could elicit responses such as “My superintendent always provides comforting food for us after a long day” or “leadership team meetings start with a check-in and a time for grounding so we can focus on the content of the meeting” (see Table 1).

Semistructured interviews offer one way to mitigate bias in allowing for structure with a more flexible approach and were used in this study. McMillan and Schumacher (2014) explained that interviews with both a structured interview script along with unstructured questions give the researcher increased flexibility during the interview process. Semistructured questions were asked in a standardized way to decrease any unintended bias.

Interviews were conducted with each participant in the study. As noted by Creswell (2014), interviews provide “indirect information filtered through the views of the interviewees” (p. 188). In-depth interviews allowed the principals to share their perceptions, opinions, and feelings regarding the factors in building and maintaining trust with their superintendent during leadership team meetings. A table of research questions and aligned interview questions assured that each research question had been addressed (Table 1). Participants in the study were also asked general demographic questions at the end of the interview.
Table 1

Alignment Table

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research question (RQ)</th>
<th>Interview question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RQ: What behaviors exemplary superintendents practice during leadership team meetings which build and maintain trust with their principals based on the facets of trust defined by Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (benevolence, reliability, competency, honesty, and openness).</td>
<td>The five facets of trust defined by researcher Megan Tschannen-Moran include benevolence, reliability, competency, honesty, and openness. Can you share your experiences during your leadership team meetings where you feel trust is built with your superintendent? What actions or behaviors exhibited by your superintendent build trust with you or members of your leadership team? What actions or behaviors exhibited by your superintendent maintain trust with you or members of your leadership team? What practices would you associate with the superintendent’s success in building and maintaining trust between the principals and the superintendent during leadership team meetings?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub RQ1: What behaviors do exemplary superintendents practice during leadership team meetings which build and maintain trust with their principals based on benevolence?</td>
<td>What does benevolence look like and feel like to you? Benevolence is concern for others including demonstrations of kindness. Benevolent leaders support the vision of an organization, acknowledging the successes and contributions of staff, and expresses interest in the well-being of others. What examples can you share of how your superintendent models benevolence during your leadership team meetings? What does benevolence look like and feel like to you? How do you feel the members of the leadership team respond when your superintendent models benevolence?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub RQ2: What behaviors do exemplary superintendents practice during leadership team meetings which build and maintain trust with their principals based on reliability?</td>
<td>Reliable leaders are consistent, dependable and deliver on what is required or expected. In what ways does your superintendent model reliability during leadership team meetings? How do you respond when your superintendent acts with reliability? Other examples of reliability include delivering on what is required or expected. Can you describe an example of a time when your superintendent acted with reliability during a leadership team meeting?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research question (RQ)</td>
<td>Interview question</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub RQ3: What behaviors do exemplary superintendents practice during leadership team meetings which build and maintain trust with their principals based on <strong>competency</strong>?</td>
<td>Competence is the ability to complete responsibilities effectively. A competent leader completes responsibilities in a timely fashion, leading others in the organization to attain the goals and vision of the organization, and demonstrates skills needed to perform their job well. In what ways does your superintendent demonstrate competency during leadership team meetings? How would you describe the relationship between your superintendent demonstrating competency and your level of trust in your superintendent?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub RQ4: What behaviors do exemplary superintendents practice during leadership team meetings which build and maintain trust with their principals based on <strong>honesty</strong>?</td>
<td>Honesty is a combination of character, integrity and authenticity. An honest leader accepts responsibility for his or her actions without distorting the truth or shifting blame to others. In what ways does your superintendent model honesty during leadership team meetings? Can you give an example of what took place and how that made you feel? Are you able to share an example of a time when your superintendent exhibited honesty when they perhaps made a mistake or had a mishap in judgment? You provided great insight on being honest. How frequently do you see this happening? Is there an intentional attempt to be honest/build transparency as a superintendent?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub RQ5: What behaviors do exemplary superintendents practice during leadership team meetings which build and maintain trust with their principals based on <strong>openness</strong>?</td>
<td>Openness is the extent to which information is revealed through open communication, shared decision-making, delegating and sharing power. What actions does your superintendent take in including members of the leadership team in planning or facilitating leadership team meetings? How do you respond when your superintendent acts with openness during your leadership team meetings? How do other members of the leadership team respond? How does your superintendent exhibit openness during leadership team meetings? This can include but is not limited to: shared decision-making, delegating or sharing power.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 1 (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>General and demographic questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Gender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. How many years have you served as an administrator?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. How many years have you served as an administrator in your current district?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Please describe a typical leadership team meeting. How often do you meet and who attends your leadership team meetings?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Expert Panel**

An expert panel was formed to help with validating several aspects of this study. This process helped validate the questions prior to deployment of the survey with the goal of ensuring that the instruments were actually addressing what was needed to be asked in responding to the research questions. The panel was also used to review the data once they were collected.

In order to help with validity, an expert panel of three members was formed. Each panel member must have met three of the six listed criteria in order to participate on the panel. The criteria were as follows:

1. Served 5 years or more as a principal in a public school district;
2. Served 5 or more years as a superintendent in a public school district;
3. Has a doctoral degree in an education-related serving in a public school district;
4. Has a master’s degree in an education-related field serving in a public school district;
5. Has presented at a county or statewide professional learning conference;
6. Has taught at the university level.

**Pilot Interview**

According to McMillan and Schumacher (2014), a pilot interview can be used to enhance the trustworthiness of the data collection. In the context of this study, validity is
directly tied to the skill and competency of the researcher. As part of the pilot interview, a principal who had experience with the phenomenon was chosen who matches the criteria for the study and was interviewed prior to the actual data collection. This principal was not a participant in the study. An observer was present, taking notes and completing a checklist regarding interviewing techniques of the researcher. Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and then reviewed by the observer who had experience with qualitative research. The observer was a retired public school administrator with a doctorate in educational leadership. The observer validated topics such as appropriate pacing, delivery, possible biases, active engagement, and possible fatigue of the respondent, increasing the validity of the study. The observer also determined whether there should be follow-up to any questions or possible missed opportunities during interviewing. A critical role of the observer was also to analyze the recording for general rapport between the researcher and the interview and to respond to the tone and feel of the interview, thereby increasing the validity of the interview process.

**Reliability**

At the most basic level, reliability in qualitative research is the ability of the research to yield consistent results (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014; Patton, 2015). Roberts (2010) noted, “Reliability is the degree to which your instrument consistently measures something from one time to another” (p. 151).

**Internal Reliability**

Internal reliability refers to the use of data collected from interviews, observations, and artifacts to create a cohesive story that is reflected through multiple data entries. Patton (2015) described four types of triangulation including data,
investigator, theory, and methodological triangulation that are used to increase the internal reliability of the data. Data in this study were analyzed using data triangulation: “the use of a variety of data sources in a study” (Patton, 2015, p. 316). Use of an expert panel also increased reliably through evaluation of the triangulated data.

**Intercoder Reliability**

Intercoder agreement is when peer examination takes place after data collection to check the plausibility of data interpretations as results begin to emerge (Creswell, 2014). This process is used to cross-check data codes using multiple researchers. Ten percent of the data collected from interviews were presented to an outside researcher who is a doctor in an education-related field and served as a past principal, who confirmed the trends, themes, and frequency counts of the collected data. A goal of 90% agreement in coded data is considered the best while 80% is acceptable to ensure accuracy of themes from coding (Lombard, Snyder-Duch, & Bracken, 2004).

**Data Collection**

Following an extensive review, trust frameworks including those by Shaw (1997) and Covey (2008), which focused on both the for-profit and nonprofit environments, the facets of trust described Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2000), based on over 4 decades of research, were selected for this study. The five facets of trust, which are defined as benevolence, reliability, competency, honesty, and openness were examined as part of this study. Data collection instruments including interviews informed the study including the data coding and analysis. The overall research delved into the information-rich stories provided by the respondents regarding their lived experiences during leadership team meetings.
Prior to a formal data collection, the application for research was submitted to the Brandman University Institutional Review Board (BUIRB) for review, recommendations, and approval. Following BUIRB approval (Appendix C), an e-mail was sent to county superintendents (Appendix D), university professors (Appendix E), superintendent search firms (Appendix F), and retired superintendents (Appendix G) formally requesting recommendations for the names of exemplary superintendents in Sonoma or San Mateo Counties.

Types of Data

Interviews. Interviews in this study consisted of semistructured questions that were developed with the assistance of an expert panel and were focused on understanding how superintendents build and maintain trust with their principals during leadership team meetings. The use of semistructured interview questions also allowed the researcher to ask follow-up questions when appropriate. All interviews remained confidential. Interviews lasted approximately 45 minutes. The researcher used a semistructured interview process, and interview questions were given to each participant in advance of the interview time scheduled with the researcher. The goal of this study was to interview 16 principals who met the criteria stated previously in this chapter.

Interview Procedures

This section details the data collection procedures that were followed by the researcher in order for the study protocol to be easily replicated.

1. The researcher contacted the following groups and/or individuals via e-mail asking for the names of superintendents who are exemplary based on the National Superintendent of the Year criteria:
a) Current county superintendents from Sonoma and San Mateo Counties

b) Superintendent search firms who serve Sonoma and San Mateo Counties

c) University professors who work with superintendents in Sonoma and San Mateo Counties

d) Retired superintendents

2. After receiving the names, the researcher then determined which exemplary superintendents led elementary school districts with fewer than 5,000 students. Superintendents who were named by two or more groups were considered exemplary for this study.

3. The researcher then contacted exemplary superintendents via phone and followed up with an e-mail communication asking for the names of principals to interview who met the stated criteria (Appendix H).

4. Superintendent endorsers also reached out to principals in their districts alerting them to the general study details.

5. A communication via e-mail and a phone call was made to each of the principals who were recommended by their superintendent and who met the criteria for the study (Appendix I).

6. Interested participants were contacted by the researcher with a mutually agreeable time and location for the interview.

7. Prior to the data collection visit, the researcher reviewed the study and the rights of the interviewees, including their right to stop and take a break at any time during the interview process.
8. An open time was provided for any questions the interviewee had for the researcher. The respondents were given the Participant’s Bill of Rights (Appendix J), the informed consent form (Appendix K) and audio recording release and consent form (Appendix L) and asked to sign the documents.

9. A copy of the operational definitions (Appendix M) was then given to the interviewees and the teams were explained by the researcher.

10. The interview lasted approximately 45 minutes and was audio recorded.

11. At the conclusion of the interview, the researcher thanked the respondent and asked whether there were artifacts that may contribute to a deeper understanding of how superintendents build trust.

12. An audio recording of the interview was sent to a third-party transcription service and was shared with the interviewee to confirm accuracy and to also give the interviewee an opportunity to give feedback and make clarifications.

Data Analysis

For this study, inductive analysis was used to analyze the data. Creswell (2014) explained, “This inductive process builds from the data to broad themes to a generalized model or theory” (p. 63). Data from this study reflect the lived experiences of principals in identifying factors that build and maintain trust with their superintendent during leadership team meetings and will be extrapolated to populations of administrators across the state of California. Data analysis included a process of organizing and preparing the transcribed data, reading and closely reviewing all data scanning for themes, coding the data using NVIVO, and then analyzing how themes answer the research questions. Data were scanned for themes that answer the research and sub-research questions, and a
frequency table was developed with the name of the theme, the frequency count, and the source of the themes. During the interviews, additional notes were taken, helping to refine questions and document nonverbal cues (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014; Patton, 2015).

**Limitations**

The researcher is the main instrument in qualitative research, and therefore credibility relies heavily on the accuracy of the instrumentation (Patton, 2015). Limitations will always be present as a part of any effective study, and it is the responsibility of the researcher to identify delimitations in the reporting of results (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014).

The following four limitations were identified for this study:

1. **Time of year.** The time of year the study is taking place could potentially limit participation in the study. The researcher conducted interviews during the months of September through November during the beginning of the academic school year. This potentially limited participation because of the availability of interviewees. The researcher worked to secure interview dates in the month of August to ensure adequate participation and minimize this limitation.

2. **Sample size.** Due to the sample size of 16 respondents, data collected for this study may not be representative of the larger cultural group.

3. **Location.** The study was conducted in two counties in Northern California. Like sample size, there was a possible limitation in the results not representing the larger cultural group.

4. **Researcher bias.** The inherent bias of the researcher could have affected the
development of emerging themes. The researcher utilized an expert panel and field-testing to minimize this limitation. The researcher also utilized methods of intercoder reliability during the data coding process as a way to verify themes and frequency counts (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014; Patton, 2015). Checking with the study participants throughout the interview process also ensured accuracy of research notes and accuracy of the interview record (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014; Patton, 2015).

Summary

The qualitative methodology of phenomenology allowed the researcher to better understand the lived experiences of principals as they build and maintain trust with their superintendent during leadership team meetings. Chapter III defined the purpose of the study, the research questions, the qualitative research design using phenomenology as a methodology, the population, and sample for the study, the instruments that were used to conduct the research, how validity and reliability of the instruments were established to produce accurate and reliable results, the process for collecting and analyzing data, and the possible limitations of the study. Chapter IV presents the data and findings of the study and Chapter V identifies and discusses major findings, conclusions, and further research recommendations.
CHAPTER IV: RESEARCH, DATA COLLECTION, AND FINDINGS

Overview

Chapter I provided an introduction to the study and its background, followed by Chapter II, a comprehensive review of the literature-focused research related to principal relationships, trust in organizations, and the functioning of leadership team meetings. In Chapter III, the researcher described the study’s methodology utilized to conduct the study describing the qualitative use of phenomenology to explore the lived experience of principals during leadership team meetings. The remainder of Chapter III reviewed the research design, population, sample, instrumentation, data collection, data analysis, limitations to the study including a summary of the chapter’s critical points. Chapter IV identifies and describes the findings from this study by examining data collected from 16 principals serving in elementary school districts with an exemplary superintendent in San Mateo or Sonoma County in Northern California. In this chapter, insights and experiences of the participants involved, the research methods and the data collection process are detailed, concluding with analysis and summary of the findings.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to identify and describe behaviors exemplary superintendents practice during leadership team meetings to build and maintain trust with their principals based on the facets of trust defined by Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (benevolence, reliability, competency, honesty, and openness).

Research Central Question

The research central question for this study was, “What behaviors do exemplary superintendents practice that build and maintain trust, as experienced by principals during
leadership team meetings, based on the facets of trust described by Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (benevolence, reliability, competency, honesty, and openness)?”

**Research Subquestions**

Sub RQ1: What behaviors do exemplary superintendents practice during leadership team meetings that build and maintain trust, as experienced by principals, based on benevolence?

Sub RQ2: What behaviors do exemplary superintendents practice during leadership team meetings that build and maintain trust, as experienced by principals, based on reliability?

Sub RQ3: What behaviors do exemplary superintendents practice during leadership team meetings that build and maintain trust, as experienced by principals, based on competency?

Sub RQ4: What behaviors do exemplary superintendents practice during leadership team meetings that build and maintain trust, as experienced by principals, based on honesty?

Sub RQ5: What behaviors do exemplary superintendents practice during leadership team meetings that build and maintain trust, as experienced by principals, based on openness?

**Research Design**

In order to gain a deeper understanding of how trust is built and maintained, it was necessary to collect narrative, information-rich stories from the field. For this study, the primary sources of data collection were semistructured interviews. Given the nature
of the need for in-depth interviews, a qualitative approach was considered to be most appropriate.

Interviews formed the foundation of this study, providing, as Creswell (2014) described, “indirect information filtered through the views of the interviewees” (p. 118). In-depth interviews allowed principals to share their perceptions, opinions, and feelings regarding the factors that build and maintain trust with their superintendent. Interviews were semistructured, so that all participants were asked a similar series of questions including some standardized questions. Semistructured interviews allowed the researcher to adapt the interview and ask appropriate follow-up questions and in this case in alignment with the five sub-research questions (Appendix B).

The goal of this study was for respondents to tell their stories, providing semistructured feedback. In reviewing and analyzing the many methods of qualitative research including ethnographic inquiry, grounded theory, and heuristic inquiry, phenomenology was identified as the most appropriate method for this research based on the specific needs of the study.

**Population**

Population, as described by Roberts (2010), “is a group of elements or cases, whether individuals, objects, or events, that confirm to a specific criteria and to which we intend to generalize the results of the research” (p. 29). This study investigated the perceptions of principals on how exemplary superintendents build and maintain trust during leadership team meetings. The criteria for serving as a principal in the state of California include holding a valid California teaching credential and completing a California Teaching Commission administrator preparation program that may include
exemptions based on certain experience and/or examination requirements and holding either a Preliminary or Clear Administrative Services Credential (Teacher Certification, 2019). The population for this study included the approximate 9,700 principals in California, as indicated by CDE (2018) who serve public schools.

**Target Population**

A target population for a study is the entire set of individuals chosen from the overall population for which the study data are to be used to make inferences. The target population defines the population to which the findings are meant to be generalized. It is important that target populations are clearly identified for the purposes of the research study (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). It is typically not feasible, because of time or cost constraints, to study large groups; therefore, the researcher chose population samples from within a larger group. The target population is identified as principals in Sonoma and San Mateo Counties who work in an elementary school district with fewer than 5,000 students and with a superintendent who has been identified as exemplary. This included six districts with 39 principals (CDE, n.d.).

Once the criteria were established identifying the target population, the researcher used established criteria for selecting exemplary superintendents. Selection included meeting two of the four criteria:

- Recommendation by experienced university professors;
- Recommendation by professional superintendent search organizations;
- Recommendation by the Sonoma or San Mateo County superintendents;
• Recommendation by retired superintendents who are active in professional organizations, teaching in doctoral programs or engaged in leadership training programs.

Recommendations for designating a superintendent as exemplary followed criteria outlined by The Schools Superintendent Association National Superintendent of the Year Program.

Each State Superintendent of the Year is judged on the following criteria:

• **Leadership for Learning**—creativity in successfully meeting the needs of students in his or her school system.

• **Communication**—strength in both personal and organizational communication.

• **Professionalism**—constant improvement of administrative knowledge and skills, while providing professional development opportunities and motivation to others on the education team.

• **Community Involvement**—active participation in local community activities and an understanding of regional, national, and international issues. (The School Superintendents Association, 2019)

**Sample**

McMillan and Schumacher (2014) defined the sample as a group of individuals within the target population from whom data was collected. The number of principals from elementary school districts in Sonoma or San Mateo Counties with an enrollment of fewer than 5,000 students serving with an exemplary superintendent, is 39 principals representing six districts, who are the target population of this study. The sample of this
study includes 16 of the 39 principals from Sonoma and San Mateo Counties with exemplary superintendents representing a minimum of six different school districts in Sonoma and San Mateo Counties.

**Sampling Procedure**

In qualitative research, there are many sampling procedures. For this study, purposeful sampling has been considered and adopted. Initially, respondents for interviews were identified through purposeful sampling. Purposeful sampling is defined as the strategic selection of “information-rich cases to study, cases that by their nature and substance will illuminate the inquiry question being investigated” (Patton, 2015, p. 215). McMillan and Schumacher (2014) indicated that purposeful sampling is pertinent when the researcher chooses participants who have information that is relevant to the subject and representative of the broad topic of study. For this study, criteria were predetermined, and selection of participants was based on meeting all of the following criteria:

- Must be a principal working in an elementary school district with an enrollment of fewer than 5,000 students in Sonoma or San Mateo Counties;
- Must have at least 2 years of experience serving as a principal with the same exemplary superintendent;
- Must have at least 4 years of experience in an administrative position.

The second sampling procedure was snowball sampling. Snowball sampling allowed the researcher to start with information-rich interviewees who could provide additional contacts who could provide differing and/or confirming perspectives (Patton, 2015) and was used as a secondary method for securing interviewees. Because of the
nature of this study, which had a focus on leadership team meetings that range in degrees of confidentiality, it was likely that respondents may not have been open to participating. For this reason, using snowball sampling was appropriate because a reference by a colleague who shares similar concerns may have lowered any anxiety and inhibition to participate. At the end of each interview, the researcher asked the respondent for references and asked permission for the respondent to reach out and inform potential future respondents of the reference.

**Demographic Data**

The study included 16 participants who met eligibility criteria to participate; they signed informed consent forms and were given the Brandman Participant Bill of Rights. Specific demographic information was collected to describe years as a principal working with their current exemplary superintendent, county of their school site, and gender. Table 2 represents demographic data that described each participant, identified with numbers from 1 to 16.

**Presentation and Analysis of Data**

The findings presented in this chapter are the outcome of 16 interviews that lasted approximately 45 minutes each. After analyzing the data in an attempt to answer the research question, “What behaviors do exemplary superintendents practice that build and maintain trust, as experienced by principals during leadership team meetings, based on the facets of trust described by Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (benevolence, reliability, competency, honesty, and openness)?” 15 themes emerged. Themes were arranged by domains aligned to the facets of trust described by Tschannen-Moran and Hoy used for this study:
• Domain 1: Benevolence
• Domain 2: Reliability
• Domain 3: Competency
• Domain 4: Honesty
• Domain 5: Openness

Table 2

Participant Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant number</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Years as principal with exemplary superintendent</th>
<th>County of school site</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant 1</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>6+</td>
<td>Sonoma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 2</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>6+</td>
<td>San Mateo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 3</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>3-5</td>
<td>Sonoma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 4</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>3-5</td>
<td>Sonoma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 5</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>3-5</td>
<td>San Mateo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 6</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>3-5</td>
<td>San Mateo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 7</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>6+</td>
<td>San Mateo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 8</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>6+</td>
<td>San Mateo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 9</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>3-5</td>
<td>San Mateo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 10</td>
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<td>3-5</td>
<td>San Mateo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 11</td>
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<td>3-5</td>
<td>San Mateo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 12</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>6+</td>
<td>San Mateo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 13</td>
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<td>3-5</td>
<td>Sonoma</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participant 14</td>
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<td>3-5</td>
<td>Sonoma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 15</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>3-5</td>
<td>Sonoma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 16</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>3-5</td>
<td>Sonoma</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The participants were current principals of elementary schools Sonoma or San Mateo Counties in California who work with an exemplary superintendent. The following emergent themes are presented in the order of highest to lowest frequency and aligned within the study’s framework domains that reflect the lived experiences of
the participants. As experienced by principals, exemplary superintendents build and maintain trust during leadership team meetings by the following:

1. Following through consistently on next steps and requests;
2. Creating a nurturing environment;
3. Fostering open and honest conversations;
4. Being open to discussing difficult or controversial topics;
5. Having the “backs” of their principals;
6. Having strong communication before, during, and after the meetings;
7. Using past experience in demonstrating knowledge about complex topics;
8. Listening with an open heart and open mind;
9. Modeling their own humanness and vulnerability;
10. Creating a “safe space” for all principals to have a voice;
11. Serving as an inspirational leader who cares about all staff;
12. Providing community building and welcoming activities;
13. Following up with individual principals after the meeting to check on their well-being;
14. Making decisions after taking all input into consideration (deep listening).

Figure 1 displays the researcher’s perspective as to how the themes and the facets of trust described by Tschannen-Moran and Hoy align in response to the interview questions to which principals who are currently working with an exemplary superintendent in Sonoma or San Mateo County indicated how their superintendent builds and maintains trust with them during leadership team meetings. The data were organized by trust-building strategies and frequencies. Prevalent themes were
highlighted in electronic and hard copies of transcribed interviews that permitted ease of coding into NVIVO, a coding software program.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domain I: Benevolence</th>
<th>Domain II: Reliability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>* Creating a nurturing environment</td>
<td>* Following through consistently on next steps and requests</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* Listening with an open heart and open mind</td>
<td>* Having the “backs” of their principals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* Serving as an inspirational leader who cares about all staff</td>
<td>* Having strong communication before, during, and after meetings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* Providing community building and welcoming activities</td>
<td>* Following up with individual principals after the meeting</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domain III: Competency</th>
<th>Domain IV: Honesty</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>* Using past experience in demonstrating knowledge about complex topics</td>
<td>* Fostering open and honest conversations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* Making decisions after taking all input into consideration (deep listening)</td>
<td>* Creating a “safe space” for all principals to have a voice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>* Being forthcoming in owning and accepting their own errors</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domain V: Openness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>* Being open to discussing difficult or controversial topics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* Modeling their own humanness and vulnerability</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 1. Themes and theoretical framework.*

Fourteen major themes emerged and were categorized under each domain. Themes that emerged from at least seven participants and with a frequency of greater than 18 were considered as practices and strategies that would build and maintain trust with principals during leadership team meetings, therefore answering the research question and subquestions.

**Data Analysis**

The researcher collected and analyzed data from 16 participants in an attempt to elicit specific practices and strategies exemplary superintendents exhibit during leadership team meetings that build and maintain trust with principals. Data collection
was gathered during individual face-to-face interviews with principals at their school sites. The researcher employed semistructured interviews with open-ended questions guided by the facets of trust described in research conducted by Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2000).

The researcher designed the method of data collection using a semistructured interview with primary and probing questions of 16 participants in face-to-face interviews. After collecting, transcribing, reviewing, and re-reading the data, the researcher of this study, as a means of seeking intercoder reliability, asked another researcher to code approximately 10% of the data collected from the interviews. The other coder confirmed the themes, trends, and frequency counts of the data collected by the researcher.

After analyzing the data collected, the researcher concluded that frequent responses under the 15 major themes related to the study’s research question and aligned with the facets of trust described by Tschannen-Moran and Hoy were significant. The major themes shown in Table 3 are presented in order of frequency from highest to lowest.

**Themes Based on Five Domains of the Tschannen-Moran and Hoy Facets of Trust**

The following data are presented in order of each domain of the Tschannen-Moran and Hoy facets of trust evidenced in the responses of 16 participants in face-to-face interviews. After analyzing the data collected, the researcher concluded that each of the domains was addressed with two to four major themes (Table 4).
Table 3

*Theme, Sources, and Frequency—Highest to Lowest Frequency*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Number of sources</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Research subquestion (SQ) answered</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Following through consistently on next steps and requests</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>SQ2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creating a nurturing environment</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>SQ1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fostering open and honest conversations with members of the Leadership Team</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>SQ4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being open to discussing difficult or controversial topics</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>SQ5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having the “backs” of their principals</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>SQ2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having strong communication before, during, and after meetings</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>SQ2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using past experience in demonstrating knowledge about complex topics</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>SQ3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening with an open heart and open mind</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>SQ1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modeling their own humanness and vulnerability</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>SQ5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creating a “safe space” for all principals to have a voice</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>SQ4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serving as an inspirational leader who cares about all staff</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>SQ1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing community building and welcoming activities</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>SQ1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Following up with individual principals after the meeting</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>SQ2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making decisions after taking all input into consideration (deep listening)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>SQ3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being forthcoming in owning and accepting their own errors</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>SQ4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The findings of the study are presented in this chapter in keeping with the aforementioned alignment of the 15 themes and the five domains of the facets of trust.
described by Tschannen-Moran and Hoy. While some themes can potentially be represented in more than one domain, the perspective of the theme, as it relates specifically to the facet of trust is the discussion of this study.

Table 4

*Domains and Major Themes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domain</th>
<th>Major themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Domain I: Benevolence</td>
<td>Domain I Theme: Creating a nurturing environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Domain I Theme: Listening with an open heart and open mind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Domain I Theme: Serving as an inspirational leader who cares about all staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Domain I Theme: Providing community building and welcoming activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domain II: Reliability</td>
<td>Domain II Theme: Following through consistently on next steps and requests</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Domain II Theme: Having the “backs” of their principals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Domain II Theme: Having strong communication before, during, and after meetings</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Domain II Theme: Following up with individual principals after the meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domain III: Competency</td>
<td>Domain III Theme: Using past experience in demonstrating knowledge about complex topics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Domain III Theme: Making decisions after taking all input into consideration (deep listening)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domain IV: Honesty</td>
<td>Domain IV Theme: Fostering open and honest conversations with members of the Leadership Team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Domain IV Theme: Creating a “safe space” for all principals to have a voice</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Domain IV Theme: Being forthcoming in owning and accepting their own errors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domain V: Openness</td>
<td>Domain V Theme: Being open to discussing difficult or controversial topics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Domain V Theme: Modeling their own humanness and vulnerability</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Domain I: Benevolence

In the Domain: Benevolence, principals of elementary school districts who work with exemplary superintendents discussed the key themes that they experienced were the foundations of building and maintaining trust during leadership team meetings. Benevolence, as defined in this study, means concern for others, including demonstrations of kindness. Benevolent leaders support the vision of the organization, acknowledge the success and contributions of staff, and express interest in the well-being of others (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000). Specifically, participants in this study noted that when superintendents create a nurturing environment, listen with an open heart and open mind, serve as inspirational leaders who care about all staff, and provide community building and welcoming activities, trust is built and maintained (Table 5).

Table 5

Domain I and Major Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domain</th>
<th>Major themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Domain I: Benevolence</td>
<td>Domain I Theme: Creating a nurturing environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Domain I Theme: Listening with an open heart and open mind</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Domain I Theme: Serving as an inspirational leader who cares about all staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Domain I Theme: Providing community building and welcoming activities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Domain I theme: Creating a nurturing environment. The research question for this study asks, “What behaviors do exemplary superintendents practice during leadership team meetings that build and maintain trust, as experienced by principals, based on
benevolence?” Analysis of the data collected resulted in the emergence of this first theme under Domain I: Benevolence. According to the data, benevolent superintendents create nurturing environments when principals come together for leadership team meetings. This theme was viewed from 14 of 16 face-to-face interviews with a frequency of 42 (Table 6).

Table 6

Themes, Source, and Frequency—Creating a Nurturing Environment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Number of sources</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Creating a nurturing environment</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

During semistructured interviews with open-ended questions, participants were asked what benevolence looks like and feels like to them during leadership team meetings and how benevolence is exhibited by their superintendent. The data revealed practices that included welcoming activities for the leadership team including sharing successes and celebrating one another. A recurring sentiment of many participants was expressed by Participant 5, stating, “We often will engage in a practice of sharing appreciation or wondering and really try to connect as a team.” Additionally, in creating a nurturing environment where principals can come together in a place where food and beverages are provided allows the principals to settle in and actually greet the district administrative team and their colleagues. While this was a common sentiment from the majority of participants, it is highlighted by Participant 15’s response where she said with excitement, “There’s a time for people to just mingle about, get some food, check-in with each other, say hi, that sort of thing.” She explained the importance of community
building even though business meeting agendas typically do not account for the extra but necessary time devoted to community building. The ability for administrators to gather and share stories in addition to doing the challenging work of the district creates a nurturing environment where trust is built. Data from this study indicated that the climate of the meeting does have an impact on the attitudes of those attending. Participant 9 shared, “Just creating a very positive climate during those leadership team meetings is important for me.” As noted by this same participant, when this type of environment is created at district-level leadership team meetings, the participant is likely to create this same environment at their own school site leadership team meetings explaining, “I think she [the superintendent] builds leadership within our leadership,” indicating the importance of creating nurturing environments both at the district-level and at the school sites. Superintendents who take the time to support principals during leadership team meetings through the creation of a nurturing environment exhibit a level of empathy that is recognized by members of the leadership team. Participant 15 was deeply appreciative of the fact that her own needs were taking care of in this nurturing environment by stating,

    Seriously, I think everyone’s a little deprived, so when you go to a meeting and there’s food, it’s like, oh my God, this is great. And [while] we’re taking care of everybody else’s needs, somebody took care of our needs.

Creating a nurturing environment can take on many forms, including providing a space for principals to come together to share stories, talk with colleagues, grab a bite to eat, and take a few minutes to settle into the meeting venue. Data from this study indicated that this type of nurturing environment demonstrates to principals that their
superintendent knows and understands their needs by providing an opportunity to build and maintain trust.

**Domain I theme: Listening with an open heart and open mind.** Further analysis of the data collected resulted in the emergence of a second theme under Domain I: Benevolence. Another major finding of the study revealed how exemplary superintendents build and maintain trust by listening with an open heart and open mind. Research by Crowley (2011) described leading with an open heart as the ability to have empathy along with understanding for both the personal and professional roles of the individuals in an organization. Crowley further explained, “What people feel in their hearts has tremendous influence over their motivations and performance in the workplace. The human heart is the driving force of human achievement” (p. 41). This theme was viewed from 13 sources with a frequency of 31 (Table 7).

Table 7

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme, Source, and Frequency—Listening With an Open Heart and Open Mind</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theme</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening with an open heart and open mind</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

During the 16 face-to-face interviews, all participants noted the importance of exemplary superintendents listening with an open heart and open mind when discussing the important work of the district in building trust with principals. District leadership team meetings provide an opportunity for superintendents to listen with an open heart and open mind, hearing from all members of their team in an environment where difficult conversations regularly take place. As superintendents take the time to fully engage and
listen to principals, they gain the trust of their principals. As expressed by Participant 1 in referring to his superintendent, “You know that she just really; she listens really, really well.” Participant 1’s sentiment of listening with an open heart and open mind was also shared by Participant 10 who stated, “Well, from a personal perspective, I trust what he’s saying to be true and I feel that I can say what’s on my mind.” Creating spaces where principals can express thoughts and ideas that at times can be controversial allows for trust building to take place during the leadership team meetings. Principals who participated in this study routinely reflected on the concept that superintendents who listened with an open heart and open mind were highly successful in building and maintaining trust during leadership team meetings. As a trust-building strategy, effective listening can help principals to tell their stories of both challenges and successes they are having at their own school sites without judgment taking place. Each of the participants reflected on the importance of listening as part of a successful leadership team culture.

The structure of leadership team meetings varied by district, but the data pointed to consistencies when looking at the role of the superintendent in the meetings. Superintendents were looked upon as the leader of the district, and their outlook and demeanor set the tone for the meetings. As described by Participant 15,

So when people are talking and engaged, even if she’s not facilitating it, she’s just sitting at the table paying attention. That matters. Right? That shows us that there’s value in what we’re doing and that she wants to know what we think and feel, and need.
Participant 15’s deep appreciation for how the superintendent intentionally took time to listen was something that every participant touched on in this study. It is one of the hallmarks participants indicated for superintendents’ building and maintaining trust.

During leadership team meetings, there are numerous competing objectives taking place at the same time, as expressed by participants in this study. There is a need to hear input from principals, and at the same time determinations must be made regarding which initiatives will be directed by the superintendents and their staff. Trust between the superintendent and the principals in a district is what allows this complex work to take place with efficiency. Participant 16 expressed this in the following manner:

I don’t hear the word “no” often, if at all from her. And if it is a “no,” she’ll make sure she explains why or says, “How about we come back after X, Y, or Z?” So, you truly feel heard from her and for me that’s immense.

The same thinking was expressed by Participant 3 in noting,

I feel like when there is a crisis or when there’s something to be managed, he doesn’t waiver. He’s very good at just saying, “Okay, this is what we need to do, and this is how we’re going to do it,” and just does that. So, I feel like that for us was calming.

When principals feel that they are truly being listened to, they are more willing to take direction from the superintendent during leadership team meetings. Principals come to know that the superintendent’s comments have the best interests of the district at the forefront. Participants in this study repeatedly stated the importance of superintendents who listen deeply with intentionality. Over time, as superintendents listen with an open heart and an open mind, trust is built and maintained.
Domain I theme: Serving as an inspirational leader who cares about all staff.

Additional analysis of the data collected resulted in the emergence of a third theme under Domain I: Benevolence. During the 16 face-to-face interviews, participants were asked how they felt during their leadership team meetings when their superintendent modeled benevolence. Responses to this question led to another major finding that described the superintendent as an inspirational leader who cares about all staff. This theme was viewed from 13 sources with a frequency of 23 (Table 8).

Table 8

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme, Source, and Frequency—Serving as an Inspirational Leader Who Cares About All Staff</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Theme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serving as an inspirational leader who cares about all staff</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Principals interviewed for this study responded with passion and respect when talking about the level of concern exhibited by their superintendent in caring about all staff. This exceptional level of caring led the principals to have deeper respect and trust for their superintendent as the actions taken by their superintendent were generated from true care and concern for others. As explained by Participant 6,

I mean, it’s caring about [you] as a person. You’re not 100% a superintendent.

I’m not only 100% principal, you know? And so, I think he sees that. You’re a dad, you’re a mom. I just think the building relationships, getting to know people.

And so that creates that safe space.

Creating spaces for principals to share their stories and show who they are outside the workspace creates opportunities for trust relationships to be built with the superintendent.
Superintendents sharing their own stories also built trust with members of the leadership team. Participant 11 shared a story of their superintendent talking about her own childhood experience, first sharing it with the leadership team and then with all staff:

She’s being really vulnerable with something that she’s trying this year. She’s doing a whole thing on your name, face, and story, and I think she really wants to open up to people and have people see her. So, she told her whole story to the community and to all the teachers and talked about where she came from and who her parents were. (Participant 11)

This level of authentic sharing was inspirational not only for principals during leadership team meetings but also resonated with teachers in the district. Participant 9 was especially impacted by this level of caring and shared that once her staff heard the life story of the superintendent, a handful of staff members exclaimed, “We never knew.”

The willingness of superintendents to share their personal stories serves as an inspiration to those who they serve demonstrating care and concern. This level of sharing also allows for greater rapport with members of the leadership team, building trust with those they serve.

Demonstrating deep care about staff was a common theme across 13 of the 16 interviews in the Domain: Benevolence, representing all exemplary superintendents in this study. Of particular note, Participant 1 shared,

The whole thing is just how much in her heart she cared about what was going on. And not only for me, but I’ve seen her with other of our staff members who are going through something. If you’re having a tough time with something not
going well in your life, boy she is in there. Just, you know, being supportive and
caring and checking in.

Exemplary superintendents demonstrate deep caring about those they serve. This
level of care builds trust with members of the leadership team as those members know
that their superintendent cares about them both as school site leaders and as individuals.
Participant 16 described her superintendent’s response when she reaches out to her for
help and support:

Even though, I know she’s as crazy busy as everybody else, if not more. Which
really does build that rapport and relationship and it makes you want to work hard
for her and to fight the fight that we all do every day, and to go the extra mile
because you see her doing it for us.

Similarly, Participant 11 shared,

If you let her know or you talk to her about something that’s going on in your life,
she’s really good about texting or following up with you, sending a little card or
note, checking in to make sure everything’s okay. Yeah, she really does care that
way.

As represented by participants in this study, serving as an inspirational leader by
demonstrating caring for all staff came naturally for the exemplary superintendents in this
phenomenological study and was a critical element in building and maintaining trust with
members of the leadership team.

**Domain I theme: Providing community building and welcoming activities.**

Further analysis of the data collected resulted in the emergence of a fourth theme under
Domain I: Benevolence. Another major finding of the study revealed how exemplary
superintendents build and maintain trust in leadership team meetings by providing community building and welcoming activities. This theme was noted in 12 sources with a frequency of 21 (Table 9).

### Table 9

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Number of sources</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Providing community building and welcoming activities</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In response to the research question, “What behaviors do exemplary superintendents practice that build and maintain trust, as experienced by principals during leadership team meetings, based on the facets of trust described by Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (benevolence, reliability, competency, honesty, and openness),” 12 principals of elementary school districts with exemplary superintendents articulated 21 times that a strategy to build and maintain trust during leadership team meetings included providing community building and welcoming activities. Participants in the study were asked to provide examples of community building and welcoming activities. Responses included a “warm welcome,” ice-breakers, sharing circles, shout-outs, appreciations or “aha moments.”

Benevolence defined in the simplest of terms is an expression of kindness. Exemplary superintendents understand that benevolence can be articulated through community building, ultimately leading to building and maintaining trust during leadership team meetings. As expressed by Participant 12,
So that’s the very first thing we always do a check-in with everybody. What’s happening? Do you need to talk about an issue? You either bring up a concern or a celebration and I think that sets the tone of, “Hell. I’m not the only one that’s having this problem with whatever it is,” and I think that brings people closer together too.

Bringing members of the leadership team together through welcome activities and community building allows for those in the room to share their experiences, which also results in shared learning. Participants in this study also shared that being a site principal can be a very challenging job, and when they leave their site to participate in leadership team meetings, it is sometimes a challenge to leave behind the work at their site and fully engage in the meetings. Exemplary superintendents in this study purposely create activities during leadership team meetings that bring principals together for a shared purpose. This action is best exemplified by Participant 6’s view of this type of community building. He stated,

We came into this meeting that was a tough meeting . . . but we did that [a welcome activity] and we were laughing and then we were all kind of like, “Okay, this is a problem we all have. Now we can kind of approach it differently as far as we’re working together.”

Participant 6 continued describing a “warm welcome,” expressing, “it’s very powerful, which I think leads to the benevolence and caring.” Participants in this study indicated when members of the leadership team spend time learning about each other, there is an opportunity to then share ideas and suggestions for the success for all members of the team. Participant 5 indicated the importance of community building activities noting,
“This year we often will engage in a practice of sharing appreciation or wondering and really try to connect as a team.” Connecting as a team was one of the direct outcomes of community building and welcoming activities leading to trust building.

In the last theme in the Domain: Benevolence, participants in this study articulated the importance of providing opportunity through community building and welcoming activities that created an environment of trust building during leadership team meetings. Overall, this Domain: Benevolence contained four themes, articulated by all participants in the study.

**Domain II: Reliability**

This second domain revealed actions taken by exemplary superintendents that build and maintain trust with their principals through reliability. Reliability is the measure of an individual’s ability to be dependable and consistent when delivering what is required or expected (Battle, 2007). Reliable leaders keep promises, deliver on commitments, and prove themselves dependable. Study participants expressly noted that exemplary superintendents are reliable when they consistently follow through on next steps and requests after leadership team meetings; have the “backs” of their principals; have strong communication before, during, and after the meetings; and follow up with individual principals after the meeting. Through these actions, superintendents build and maintain trust with their principals (Table 10).

**Domain II theme: Following through consistently on next steps and requests.**

Analysis of the data collected led to the emergence of the first theme under Domain II: Reliability. The working definition of reliability in this study refers to a leader who is consistent and dependable and will deliver on what is required or expected. Another
major finding of the study revealed how exemplary superintendents build and maintain trust by following through consistently on next steps and requests from leadership team meetings. This theme was noted in 14 sources with a frequency of 44, which was the highest noted frequency in the study (Table 11).

Table 10

*Domain II and Major Themes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domain</th>
<th>Major themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Domain II: Reliability</td>
<td>Domain II Theme: Following through consistently on next steps and requests</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Domain II Theme: Having the “backs” of their principals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Domain II Theme: Having strong communication before, during, and after meetings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Domain II Theme: Following up with individual principals after the meeting.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 11

*Themes, Source, and Frequency—Following Through Consistently on Next Steps and Requests*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Number of sources</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Following through consistently on next steps and requests</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Study participants were emphatic when they discussed the importance of superintendents demonstrating reliability in building and maintaining trust. As stated by Participant 6, “If there’s something he needs to do or we need to do, I mean he just is, he’s continuously getting it done.” This idea of “just getting it done” was discussed at length by participants in this study. The suggestion that the superintendent could be
relied upon built trust with the principals as they knew that regardless of the complexity of the task, the work was going to get done. As expressed by Participant 2, “He says what he says he’s going to do, he does it. So he keeps trust in that way, and he also keeps trust because he is really responsive.” This level of responsiveness was noted by numerous participants and articulated clearly by Participant 14 when referring to her superintendent; she stated, “I do think she’s reliable. She’s dependable. If she says she’s going to do something then she does it.” Exemplary superintendents in this study include those who lead districts in Sonoma County. Over the past 2 years, tremendous stress has been placed on Sonoma County school districts because of the extensive fires in the county that directly impacted multiple districts. Principals in this study discussed how the reliability of their superintendent during these emotional, challenging times made them more able to deal with complex situations happening at their own school sites and begin building trust within their own school communities. In referencing the aftermath of the fires and how to deal with the complexities of displaced families, Participant 13 emphasized how the reliably of his superintendent in working with principals during such challenging times built trust with members of the leadership team and his community when he recounted,

So, I think that that event in itself, as horrific as it was, really helped me become the leader. I had to be a leader now. No more figuring this out. Do it. And with her leadership, I think it’s what really allowed me to grow as a leader.

The face-to-face interview with Participant 3 yielded an answer that was a consistent response and mindset among study participants from Sonoma County. Participant 3
explained, “He just was very reassuring and calming and that just made me feel like, ‘Okay, I can do this.’”

Data from this study indicated that the ability of exemplary superintendents to follow through by not only providing tangible next steps on action items but also providing moral support and strong communications in modeling reliability. This level of reliability supports a leadership team environment that builds and maintains trust.

**Domain II theme: Having the “backs” of their principals.** Further analysis of the data collected resulted in the second theme under Domain II: Reliability. This facet of the study identified how trust is built and maintained when exemplary superintendents have the backs of their principals when dealing with challenging or complex situations. This theme was noted in 14 sources with a frequency of 32 (Table 12).

**Table 12**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Number of sources</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Having the “backs” of their principals</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When analyzing the data, respondents noted that trust was built when their superintendents “stood up for them” when parents or community members brought concerns to the superintendent. This support was often discussed during leadership team meetings in the form of debriefing conversations. The structure of leadership teams and members of those teams varied by district, but what was consistent was the opportunity for principals to bring up topics when they felt they needed support from their superintendent. Participant 10 described this by stating, “I can rely on him to guide me or
to advise or to support me.” In discussing a meeting topic related to a special education issue, Participant 6 shared,

He was almost role playing my real life. But that felt supportive at the time because he almost challenged and pushed back his own team to think differently to support us. So, in that moment too, I was like “Okay, he’s got my back.”

(Participant 6)

The role of the superintendent is to be someone who, while reporting to a board of trustees, is also held accountable for their actions by members of the leadership team. Members of the leadership team want their superintendents to do what is best for children, and in some cases, this may mean sharing an unpopular position with the board of trustees. An example of this level of support was articulated by Participant 11 in stating,

I would say standing up to the board or the decision-makers when principals feel that the decisions are correct for their sites and for the children. And I think that’s definitely a strength of hers and we know that she will do that. That’s really helpful.

The concept of superintendents having the backs of their principals extends outside of board members or decision makers. In a further example, Participant 16 in describing how her superintendent “looks out” for her principals explained,

And you see that in her actions. You hear it in her words. I’ve personally have taken the time to reach out and talk to her and tell her how much I appreciate her leadership because not everybody’s willing to do that. I have seen other superintendents, unfortunately, step aside and let somebody else take the blame or
the firing squad to save themselves. And that’s not [my superintendent]. [My superintendent] will stand in front of anybody before one of us.

This concept of superintendents putting themselves on the line in support of their principals was expressed by Participant 14 and echoed by Participants 1, 10, and 12: “There are things where when she does stand up and talk, she talks about wanting to support us as principals. She talks about, ‘If there’s anything that you need, let the district know, we’re here to help you’” (Participant 14). Participant 6, in discussing the support he receives from his superintendent when facing challenging issues stated, “And it’s with his follow through. It’s not just in the leadership team meetings. . . . He was supportive. He was right there” (Participant 6). Superintendents who are fully engaged in the leadership team meetings also demonstrate to their principals that what they had to say was important and meaningful to them. Reiterating the concepts expressed by Participants 2, 3, and 16, Participant 14 concluded,

I think the biggest part about trust and the administrators or myself trusting is engagement in what we’re doing. If I felt that the leader, even if they’re not the one facilitating it, is engaged in what’s going on, then that increases the level of trust. It’s like, okay, you’re in this with us.

In the Domain: Reliability, the theme of having the backs of principals builds trust, as principals know that their superintendent is going to support them. Data supporting this theme was best summarized by Participant 16, “She and her words and her expressions and her actions have shown she will always have my back.”

**Domain II theme: Having strong communication before, during, and after meetings.** In response to the second sub-research question, “What behaviors do
exemplary superintendents practice during leadership team meetings that build and maintain trust, as experienced by principals, based on reliability?” 14 principals working with exemplary superintendents articulated 32 times that a key practice was for superintendents to have strong communication before, during, and after leadership team meetings (Table 13).

Table 13

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Number of sources</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Having strong communication before, during, and after meetings</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Participants in the study were asked to give examples of what this might look like in practice and shared that transparency was a key practice in building strong communications and trust. Participant 14 explained,

So, one thing that she does at the meetings that builds trust is, like I said, being transparent about what’s going on, telling us this is the reality or this is what’s happening at the district or this is why we’re doing such and such.

According to participants in this study, in addition to being transparent, exemplary superintendents were not afraid to communicate when they did not know all the answers. Participant 13 stated,

She was compassionate; she was strong; she would listen and she communicated.

And I think that’s one of the things that I learned most in those trying times is you
have to communicate. Even if you don’t have anything to say, you let them know, “This is what I know and I don’t know anything else.”

According to Participant 11, members of the leadership team knew their superintendent would reliably communicate sensitive issues to the team, trusting that principals and members of the leadership team would keep shared information confidential. In return, members of the team felt they could trust their superintendent to communicate issues that may directly impact principals or their schools. This theme was articulated by Participant 11 in stating, “She’ll tell us the truth about what’s going on. For example, there’s something happening at the middle school and it’s ugly, right? And she’ll say, ‘I need all of you to know this and this is why.’” Participant 10 felt strongly that their superintendent clearly understood the importance of strong communication and was willing to take the time to get information from members of the school community and then check in with principals to get their feedback. During the interview, this participant reflected on ways in which their superintendent regularly shared important and sensitive information with the leadership team with consistency and reliability. This participant stated,

He’ll come back and report out . . . and say, “Here’s what we learned. We’re going to focus on these areas.” And then, he puts out some stuff to the community and get some feedback and then he brings it to us and says, “Here’s what, how it’s going, what do you guys think about this? Does this seem reasonable?”

The ability of superintendents to communicate the needs of stakeholders and then ask for feedback from principals was greatly valued by participants in this study. Participant 1
was emphatic about his appreciation of his superintendent’s willingness to communicate ideas and listen to feedback stating, “Sometimes, you know, we’ll come up with an idea and I’ll say, you know, she was getting ready to push the send button. I’m thinking, can we talk about this for a minute and let’s maybe rethink that response.” His superintendent’s response was positive and affirmative.

Participants in this study also discussed how strong communications before, during, and after leadership team meetings led to an increase of trust between principals and their superintendent. This trust is built when superintendents share sensitive information so that principals can make good decisions when they return to their sites. Superintendents must trust that principals will keep this information confidential.

Participant 15 summarized how trust is built by explaining,

And that really pulls everybody in close, because it’s like, okay, you’re not leaving us in the dark. You’re going to trust that we will keep this confidential and give us information that we need to be able to make good decisions within ourselves based on the context of the larger climate, and not have us operating in the dark like we’re just puppets, because we have all the information to be strategic and stay one or two steps ahead of something.

Reliability in this study also extended to actions that were at times difficult taken by exemplary superintendents. Participant 12 stated,

I think reliable makes it sound like it’s easy, but being reliable isn’t necessarily easy because she’ll come back to the hard things and we will talk about the hard things. We’ll talk about having to let a teacher go or like those kinds of things. So, to me, that’s being reliable. Good or bad, we’re going to talk about that.
The data generated in this study indicated that superintendents who model vulnerability by sharing sensitive information during leadership team meetings created a trusting environment as expressed by study participants. In addition, principals articulated that following up with principals after the meeting generated trust with members of the leadership team through reliable actions.

Domain II theme: Following up with individual principals after the meeting.

In this domain, principals discussed actions that exemplary superintendents took that demonstrated reliability. This theme focused on how superintendents followed up with individual principals after the meeting creating an environment that builds and maintains trust. This level of follow through allowed for the principals to trust the words and actions of their superintendent, knowing that their superintendent was genuinely interested in the needs of that principal. This experience was described by 12 sources with a frequency of 21 (Table 14).

Table 14

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Number of sources</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Following up with individual principals after the meeting.</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>21</td>
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</table>

During interviews, principals discussed the importance of having their superintendent follow up after their leadership team meetings. This follow-up extended beyond the content of the meeting and extended to the well-being of the principals attending that meeting. The ability of exemplary superintendents to read the emotions of their principals during leadership team meetings and then follow up was expressed most
clearly by Participant 13. In responding to the researcher’s request to describe what
reliability looked like and felt like during leadership team meetings, this participant
focused on what his superintendent did after the meeting:

I walked into a principals’ meeting [leadership team meeting] and at the end of
the meeting I was feeling pretty frustrated. Not with what happened there, but
just with situations that I was dealing with at my site. At the end of the meeting,
she bee-lined over to me and said, “What’s going on?” I said, “Nothing. What do
you mean?” She’s like, “No, you’re not yourself right now.” She was very
attuned to the fact that I was struggling in that moment and gave me support and
after we talked a little bit about some things. She was there to kind of talk it
through.

This ability for exemplary superintendents to follow up with individual principals
after meetings creates an environment of reliability and responsiveness that ultimately
builds trust with leadership team members. This theme was articulated by Participant 6
stating, “And it’s with his follow through. It’s not just in the leadership team meetings.
No. It is all of the staff issues that I had last year, he was supportive. He was right
there.” Participants 1, 2, 9, and 13 all articulated the importance of this follow-up and the
one-on-one time they had with their superintendent after the meeting. During this one-
on-one time, topics from the leadership team were discussed, but of equal importance
was the ability of the superintendent to reach out to principals to discuss issues regarding
their well-being or the well-being of their staff members. In discussing her
superintendent during one-on-one meetings, Participant 2 explained, “He shines more in
terms of when you’re having meetings with him, and you’re talking through what needs
to be done or what worries or concerns are. That’s where he really shines.” Similarly, Participant 11 shared,

If you let her know or you talk to her about something that is going on in your life, she’s really good about texting or following up with you, sending a little care or note, checking in to make sure everything is okay.

Of additional importance to Participant 9 was the face-to-face time with her superintendent: “They [one-on-one meetings] are very meaningful. I just can’t do everything via e-mail.”

The ability of exemplary superintendents to build and maintain trust through reliable actions including follow-up after leadership team meetings was expressed by 12 participants in this study. Data indicated that these actions, including follow-up communications, meeting with principals one-on-one, discussing topics related to leadership team meetings, and expressing an authentic interest in the well-being of the principal were the foundations for building and maintaining trust with leadership team members.

**Domain III: Competency**

In the Domain: Competency, key themes in building and maintaining trust expressed by principals of elementary school districts who work with exemplary superintendents include superintendents who use past experience in demonstrating knowledge about complex topics. An additional theme focused on superintendents who use deep listening in making decisions after taking all input into consideration. Competency, as defined in this study, means the ability to complete tasks and responsibilities effectively. A competent leader is one who completes tasks in a timely
fashion, leading others in the organization to complete the goals of the organization while demonstrating the skills needed to perform their job well (Tschannen-Moran, 2014a).

Specifically, participants in this study noted that when superintendents demonstrate knowledge about complex topics and make decisions after gathering input through deep listening, trust is built and maintained (Table 15).

Table 15

*Domain III and Major Themes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domain III: Competency</th>
<th>Domain III Theme: Using past experience in demonstrating knowledge about complex topics</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Domain III Theme: Making decisions after taking all input into consideration (deep listening)</td>
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</table>

**Domain III theme: Using past experience in demonstrating knowledge about complex topics.** Through the use of semistructured interview questions focused on the behaviors exemplary superintendents’ practice in building and maintaining trust with principals, data collected resulted in the first theme under Domain III: Competency. The study revealed the importance of superintendents’ using past experience in demonstrating their knowledge of complex topics. This theme was expressed by 11 of 16 sources with a frequency of 32 (Table 16).
Participants in this study noted the importance of exemplary superintendents using their past experience in supporting principals when addressing complex topics. All participants in this study shared that during leadership team meetings difficult topics are discussed and ideas are shared on how to navigate these challenges. “It feels very much as a team environment,” noted Participant 8, expressing appreciation for the opportunity to address these types of issues during leadership team meetings. Participant 9 discussing the value of having a competent superintendent who uses her past experiences shared, “We’re able to have conversations where she’ll relay a similar experience that she has in the past.” Exemplary superintendents in this study often offered suggestions to principals in solving issues rather than giving out mandates on how the issue needed to be addressed. An example of this comes from Participant 12 expressing her view of competency:

She’s just very strategic and she knows what the obstacles are ahead of time. To me, that’s very competent because I feel very comfortable going to her with a problem or situation and just say, “What do you think” and she says, “What’s your plan? Have you thought about this?” To me, that’s somebody that I can go to because it’s not like she has all the answers, but she is happy to be a collaborative partner.
The ability for exemplary superintendents to use past experience and knowledge in creating a collaborative culture in leadership team meetings, as the expectation, was a common experience for participants in this study. As trust builds through the expressed competency of the superintendent, the more likely principals will follow the lead of their superintendent. Participant 13 expressed this sentiment exuberantly by saying the following about his superintendent: “She’s very convincing and determined. So, when she comes to us and says, ‘These are the things I’m thinking,’ by the time she’s done talking, most everyone in the room is like, ‘Yeah, that’s what we’re thinking too!’” The concept of previous experience similar to that of principals was valuable to the participants' believing that their superintendent was competent.

It was also expressed by research participants that having this type of prior experience led superintendents to make better decisions because of their knowledge in navigating complex topics. Participant 8 explained,

I do feel like having walked in your shoes, it’s easier to understand what you’re going through, at least I feel that way because when I was at the district-level and I was able to say, “I experienced that,” it’s just helpful because sometimes people just don’t know what it’s like.

Through data analysis, exemplary superintendents are able to share their experiences in navigating complex topics, therefore demonstrating competency and ultimately building trust with members of their leadership team.

**Domain III theme: Making decisions after taking all input into consideration (deep listening)**. The competency of superintendents was correlated with using deep listening when making decisions in this theme. Participants quickly pointed out the
importance of listening to principals before decisions were made by superintendents and the collegial trust that is built when superintendents turn to their principals for input and advice. Principals appreciated the ability to serve as an advisor to the superintendent and understood the importance of this role. This theme was expressed by seven sources with a frequency of 20 (Table 17).

Table 17

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Number of sources</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Making decisions after taking all input into</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>consideration (deep listening)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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Participants in this study truly reflected on what it meant to have a superintendent who asks regularly for the input and the thinking of their principals when making decisions. In one example, superintendents who take the time to gather input from principals through deep listening are recognized as competent leaders. This was clearly expressed by Participant 1 who stated,

Even though I’ve been doing this gig for a while, I’m still learning stuff from her and she’ll often come over and ask me what I think. Yeah, I think that’s a really good sign of a leader who is competent in that you’re willing to go to your players and say, what do you think we ought to do with this one?

Participant 16 also felt that taking the time to gather input was of great importance to her:

And the thing that’s showing her competence, she didn’t make hasty decisions . . . And especially with so much that comes at the education field constantly, it’s nice
to see that someone’s acknowledging, taking time, getting feedback and really saying, is this what’s best for our school district?

In another example, a participant in this study and her principal colleagues were concerned with a request made from a foundation in their community and the impact it would have on their schools. They went to their superintendent to express this concern. Participant 12 said, “We had a situation where the foundation wanted to do something and we all said, ‘Oh that doesn’t sound like a good idea’ and she [the superintendent] thought about it. So now we’re in the middle of that conversation.”

Superintendents who are willing to ask for input, using deep listening, allow members of their leadership team to be a part of the decision-making for the district in which they serve. This theme was captured by Participant 5 in sharing the following, He really seeks to understand. One, “What is the question?” and two, “Where is the question coming from?” So, he values those questions and often they help the team as a whole really come to consensus and have common messaging and come out [of the meeting] with clarity.

The ability to recalibrate and change directions based on input was also valuable in dealing with complex situations. Participant 16 stated,

For instance, when it came to things that are unknown, like the fire situation we have, I don’t know of anybody who would have the competence and knowledge of how to do it, but showing that she’s organized and reaches out for resources and support; she jumps into anything and everything just getting her hands dirty. Competency is a valued characteristic of exemplary superintendents and was acknowledged explicitly by participants in this study. The data indicated that when
superintendents make decisions after taking input of their principals into consideration, trust is built within their team.

**Domain IV: Honesty**

In the Domain: Honesty, three key themes emerged when addressing actions exemplary superintendents take to build and maintain trust with principals during leadership team meetings. Themes in this domain include exemplary superintendents fostering open and honest conversations, creating a “safe space” for all principals to have a voice, and being forthcoming in owning and accepting their own errors. Honesty, as defined in this study, is a combination of authenticity, integrity, and character (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000). Honest leaders accept responsibility for their actions without misrepresenting the truth or blaming others. Through actions taken by exemplary superintendents in exhibiting honesty, trust is built and maintained with principals during leadership team meetings (Table 18).

Table 18

*Domain IV and Major Themes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domain</th>
<th>Major themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Domain IV: Honesty</td>
<td>Domain IV Theme: Fostering open and honest conversations with members of the Leadership Team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Domain IV Theme: Creating a “safe space” for all principals to have a voice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Domain IV Theme: Being forthcoming in owning and accepting their own errors</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Domain IV theme: Fostering open and honest conversations with the leadership team.** In response to the question, “What behaviors exemplary
superintendents exhibit to build and maintain trust with their principals based on honesty?” nearly all respondents (14 of 16 sources) noted that fostering open and honest conversations led principals to see their superintendent as honest, creating an atmosphere of trust during their leadership team meetings. Fourteen sources mentioned this theme a total of 39 times (Table 19).

Table 19
Themes, Source, and Frequency—Fostering Open and Honest Conversations With the Leadership Team

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Number of sources</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fostering open and honest conversations with the leadership team</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
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</table>

During semistructured interviews with open-ended questions, principals from elementary school districts with exemplary superintendents were asked to give examples of how their superintendent demonstrated honesty during leadership team meetings. Participants were unanimous in stating that they felt their superintendent was honest. When exemplary superintendents are not afraid to hear what members of their team have to say, even if it is difficult to hear, they create an environment of trust. Participant 15 explained that she and other members of the leadership team shared their experiences with the impact the North Bay fires had on their schools and communities because of the willingness of their superintendent to create an atmosphere of openness and honesty:

We did a whole principal restorative circle after the fires while the schools were still closed so everyone got to speak about their experiences, both professionally
and personally, and there were many tears in the room, and then it was, “Okay, what do you need?”

Participant 15 continued to express her thankfulness in having a superintendent who was willing to spend the time on these types of activities in which principals are afforded the opportunity to speak openly and honestly in leadership team meetings. In describing an activity that took place at the beginning of the school year, Participant 15 explained that members of the leadership team were giving a presentation, and the superintendent “came close and started a conversation with you in front of everybody about, ‘Well now, why do you think that you do it that way,’ and kind of encouraging question, encouraging us to publicly reflect.”

In fostering open and honest conversations with members of the leadership team, exemplary superintendents also model these attributes. Participant 3 clearly shared this view in stating, “I think he’s very open and honest. Speaks from the heart. Authentic. That makes me feel trustworthy of him. I don’t feel like there’s that hidden agenda. I feel like he lays everything out on the table.” This type of honesty expressed by a superintendent was also noted in conversation with Participant 4 as he discussed the willingness of his superintendent to answer questions about how they came to a particular solution. “And again, going back to the trust and the relationship we’ve established. I feel comfortable enough to ask, ‘What was running through your mind? What helped lead you to that decision?’”

Participant 5 described her superintendent as someone who is “the kind of leader where if someone asks a question his guard doesn’t go up and he’s not on the defensive.” She described the atmosphere of the leadership team meetings where members of the
team can have honest conversations about issues that are directly impacting their school sites. When a topic came up at the meeting focused on a new district initiative at the school sites that was not going well, principals at the leadership team meeting shared, “This is coming up and we want to be team players and we see the benefit, but what’s our common message? And so, we all started asking the same question” (Participant 5). The superintendent in this situation did not exhibit defensiveness but instead asked their team to come back to “home base.” Coming back to home base meant working together and looking for a solution that would address the problem and move the initiative forward.

According to data collected for this study, the ability of exemplary superintendents to foster open and honest conversations with leadership team members was an important factor in building and maintaining trust with principals. Participants in this study welcomed the opportunity to share their concerns and perspectives during leadership team meetings while also valuing the same from their superintendent.

**Domain IV theme: Creating a “safe space” for all principals to have a voice.** Further analysis of the data resulted in the emergence of this second theme under Domain IV: Honesty. The study revealed how exemplary superintendents gain the trust of principals during leadership team meetings when exhibiting honesty through the creation of a safe space for all principals to have a voice. This theme was articulated by 12 sources with a frequency of 25 (Table 20).
Table 20

Themes, Source, and Frequency—Creating a “Safe Space” for All Principals to Have a Voice

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Number of sources</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Creating a “safe space” for all principals to have a voice</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>25</td>
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</table>

In response to the question of how trust is built and maintained with exemplary superintendents during leadership team meetings, this theme focused on the creation of safe spaces for all principals to have a voice during leadership team meetings. This theme was expressed by 12 of 16 participants. Overall, participants described different ways in which exemplary superintendents created opportunities for principals to share their thoughts and concerns without judgment. Participant 4 referred to the ability of her superintendent to model openness, which creates a safe space for all participants: “She’s willing to admit when she maybe didn’t make the best choice and is always open to hear other perspectives and maybe take that information and use it to change her decision. But it’s very open. It’s very brave.”

Participant 11 was asked by the researcher whether she felt she could share power in the meeting by the conversations which take place. She responded by stating, “Yes, yes. Absolutely. . . . Definitely, there’s dialogue and we’re open to talking about things and if you have a history in the district or you have ideas to share, you are definitely listened to.” Participant 10 also expressed her appreciation of a safe space in her leadership team meetings, “I feel we can give our input and that it’s valued and heard.” Participant 1 also concluded, “She is not dismissive of anything that we bring to the table.” Data from this study point to creating safe spaces for principals to share their
thinking in leadership team meetings creating a meeting culture of honesty and collegiality. This culture of honesty is created in part by exemplary superintendents recognizing the contributions of their team. Participant 16 stated,

> She will always give credit to the team. I don’t think I’ve heard her say, “I did this.” She always refers to the team. . . . She is not one who takes credit first. She will always give to others.

A similar response was also generated from Participant 2 who described a situation in which she spoke to her superintendents about the tone of the leadership team meetings, explaining that she did not feel like the meetings had heart. She said,

> I don’t feel that our hearts are being touched. That it’s [the leadership team meeting] is too business driven. . . . And he was like, “You’re right. You’re absolutely right. We’ll work on it.” So sure enough, at our retreat, it changed and it became more heart-driven opposed to task-oriented.

This openness to listening to principals was also discussed by Participants 1, 5, and 7, with Participant 9 summarizing, “It’s okay to ask questions, for us to be open, and there’s no harm in . . . just making it a safe space.”

> Through interviews with study participants, the data clearly indicated that the willingness of exemplary superintendents to create safe spaces for principals to have a voice and then superintendents changing their practices based on principal input is what builds and maintains trust with members of the leadership team.

**Domain IV theme: Being forthcoming in owning and accepting their own errors.** Continued analysis of the data collected resulted in this second theme under Domain IV: Honesty. The study revealed how exemplary superintendents build and
maintain trust with principals during leadership team meetings by being forthcoming in owning and accepting their own errors. This theme was expressed by 10 sources with a frequency of 19 (Table 2).

Table 2

| Themes, Source, and Frequency—Being Forthcoming in Owning and Accepting Their Own Errors |
|-------------------------------------------|------------------|------------------|
| Being forthcoming in owning and accepting their own errors | 10               | 19               |

In response to the research question, “What behaviors do exemplary superintendents exhibit which build and maintain trust with principals during leadership team meetings?” 10 principals of elementary school districts articulated 19 times that the ability of superintendents to be forthcoming in owning and accepting their errors. This behavior allowed principals to see their superintendents as honest.

Participants were asked to give examples of how their superintendent demonstrated honesty during leadership team meetings. All participants stated that they felt their superintendents were honest in their communications and actions both during leadership team meetings and in their regular interactions. Participant 1 spoke of numerous interactions in which his superintendent was not afraid about admitting when she needed to rethink a course of action if they made a misjudgment: “If she has missed something, she owns it right away. She owns it.” He continued, stating, “She’ll walk back something when she says that we jumped too quick right there. She will walk it back.” This ability to reflect on actions taken and then change course was valuable in
research participants seeing their superintendent as honest. Participant 11 described a situation in which her superintendent made choices regarding an outside firm doing work with the district, and it was not the firm that had previously worked with the district for many years. Her superintendent acknowledged that she should have done a better job with communication. Participant 11 said, “She acknowledged right away that she felt that she didn’t communicate with them well enough about the switch, and they were angry. But she’ll come in and say, “I probably should have faced it better, I should have talked to them.” Participant 11 then continued, “She’s super real that way if something could have been done a different way. She laughs at herself.” In another example of exemplary superintendents owning and accepting their errors, Participant 14 shared, “I have seen her fall on her sword” explaining the actions her superintendent took in working with the board of trustees on compensation. Participant 14 then elaborated, describing what her superintendent expressed to the leadership team in explaining what she should have done differently. Her superintendent was clear in expressing: “That was my mistake. I should have done that.” “That” was explained as taking a different tack in communicating with the board of trustees.

Participant 13 shared an example of a time when his superintendent completed a successful task but upon reflection felt that she wished she would have completed the task differently:

There were times where, once we had accomplished it, once it was successful, she said that there were ways that she wished that she had done it differently, different things. Knowing what she knows now, she wishes she would have done things differently in other ways. (Participant 13)
This same participant elaborated on the actual preparation for the leadership team meetings in terms of being forthcoming: “She comes prepared. She comes prepared but she’s not afraid to say, ‘I don’t know.’ And I think that probably goes back to the trust thing. She’s not afraid to say, ‘I don’t know’” (Participant 13). Participant 7 shared similar thinking in that her superintendent is forthcoming and not afraid to go to others when he does not know the answer:

He’s honest about it. If he doesn’t know something, then he will say, “I talked to these people,” like to the expert, the county office, you, some other superintendents, and I found out that I didn’t understand this, so I want to make sure you guys know.

According to participants in this study, exemplary superintendents who are willing to be forthcoming and own their errors create an environment where principals in leadership team meetings are more willing to trust because of the honesty of the superintendent. Data from this study indicated that exemplary superintendents who model honesty during leadership team meetings create a culture of openness and inclusion.

**Domain V: Openness**

In the Domain: Openness, principals of elementary school districts who work with exemplary superintendents discussed the key themes that they perceive were the underpinning of building and maintaining trust during leadership team meetings. Openness, as defined in this study, is the extent to which information is revealed through open communication, shared decision-making, delegating, and sharing power (Battle, 2007). Participants in this study shared that exemplary superintendents express openness
when they are willing to discuss difficult or controversial topics, modeling their own
humanness and vulnerability. Through these actions, exemplary superintendents build
and maintain trust with their principals during leadership team meetings (Table 22).

Table 22

*Domain V and Major Themes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domain</th>
<th>Major themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Domain V: Openness</td>
<td>Domain V Theme: Being open to discussing difficult or controversial topics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Domain V Theme: Modeling their own humanness and vulnerability</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Domain V theme: Being open to discussing difficult or controversial topics.**

Further analysis of the data gathered for this study revealed that principals in elementary
districts with exemplary superintendents perceive their superintendents as being open
when they are willing to discuss difficult or controversial topics while keeping an open
mind. This theme was discussed by 14 of 16 sources with a frequency of 34 (Table 23).

Table 23

*Themes, Source, and Frequency—Being Open to Discussing Difficult or Controversial Topics*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Number of sources</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Being open to discussing difficult or controversial topics</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In response to the research question, “What behaviors do exemplary
superintendents exhibit to build and maintain trust with members of their leadership
team, as experienced by principals?” a total of 14 study participants articulated that having a superintendent who is open to discussing difficult or controversial topic was essential in building and maintaining trust. Several participants articulated the importance of a superintendent who is willing to discuss topics that are difficult or controversial knowing that these conversations were valuable to the leadership team.

Participant 1 articulated the importance of having the opportunity to discuss issues that are directly impacting the school sites and having a superintendent who really wants to hear the truth, “You know, it’s like, oh, we really get to talk about what’s going on at our schools and how’s the climate working and what are some student challenges we’re facing and parents, how are we doing?” In a follow-up question, the researcher asked the participant whether he feels this builds trust with the superintendent. He responded by saying, “Oh we’re, we are so open. We are so transparent with each other. I mean, I go in and just speak what’s on my mind,” and then elaborating, “I think she’s really great about those hard conversations” (Participant 1).

Participant 7, in discussing how he feels in meetings when principals are able to speak out or have a different opinion from their superintendent explained,

I’m strategic about what I say in front of everyone, but I can say, “I’m not sure about that. Why are we going to do that? I don’t see the rationale or what is the rationale of that?” You’re free to do that with him.

This same ability to create a leadership team environment where members are able to discuss difficult topics was expressed by Participant 11 in the context of being a strong leader, “She’ll tell us the truth about what’s going on. For example, if there’s something happening at the middle school and it’s ugly, right, and she’ll say, ‘I need all of you to
When asked about the openness of the actions taken by her superintendent she added, “Yeah and I think everyone appreciates that.” When asked about the structure of her leadership team meeting, Participant 5 explained the number of meetings that take place each month along with which administrators attend those meetings. In describing the actual format, she shared, “There’s a safe space to ask questions. That’s where I really value [the superintendent] in that he is the kind of leader where if someone asks a question his guard doesn’t go up and he’s not on the defensive” (Participant 5). When asked about what characteristics make a strong leader, Participant 8 shared, “I think she’s very honest. She sets up the environment so that there can be open conversations or really tries to foster that.”

In building and maintaining trust in leadership team meetings, superintendents demonstrate openness to discussing difficult or controversial topics. Data indicated that the impact of this openness creates an environment where principals are willing to share and also to be able to learn about issues impacting the overall district.

**Domain V theme: Modeling their own humanness and vulnerability.**

Continued analysis of the data gathered resulted in the second theme under Domain V: Openness. The study revealed that exemplary superintendents who model their own humanness and vulnerability create relationships with their principals that build and maintain trust through openness. This theme was discussed by nine sources with a frequency of 26 (Table 24).
In response to the research question, “What behaviors build and maintain trust with your superintendent during leadership team meetings?” nine principals serving elementary districts articulated 26 times that superintendents who model their own humanness and vulnerability demonstrate openness and build trust. Participants were asked to identify ways in which their superintendent demonstrated openness as a means of developing trusting relationships. Nine participants expanded on the role of humanness and vulnerability played in creating meetings where trust is built and maintained. An example of a superintendent demonstrating vulnerability came from Participant 16 explaining,

She puts herself out there and makes herself vulnerable. For instance, I know this movement [describes movement] was not necessarily supported from some people and she didn’t back down with it. She knows it’s what’s best for our kids. She had the research and the documentation and the data behind it to show it. She moved forward with it. And I know there’s been a push back and fight with some different areas, but she listens and stands strong. The only way I can describe it, she’s just very down to earth and humanistic.

Participant 16 added,

She makes herself vulnerable. She does; she herself will talk about things that may seem sensitive or, her emotions of how she’s connected with what she’s
going through. She always shown to be strong, but yet just down to earth. She doesn’t hold the title and the hierarchy part. I trust in the fact that she’s not just words.

When the researcher asked Participant 3 about her interactions with her superintendent and his openness during leadership team meetings, she shared, “He’s very authentic. And when he says it, you know it comes from the heart. Again [the superintendent] is not going to say anything he does not actually feel or believe. That’s the authentic part” (Participant 3). Participants consistently used the word “authentic” in describing the exemplary superintendents in this study. Participant 5, when describing the actions taken by her superintendent shared, “He was like, ‘In order to be effective, people need to see you’re human and that you are approachable.’” She then shared a story that her superintendent told the leadership team and then the entire staff regarding his own experiences going through school,

He shared his story behind his name and opened himself to being vulnerable. He said, “My entire life going through school, people called me the wrong name. . . .” And so he’s like, “My name is who I am and I was just never identified that way.” (Participant 5)

This ability to demonstrate both humanness and vulnerability was also described by Participant 9 in describing her superintendent’s willingness to share her own story both with the leadership team and then with all staff members and the impact it had on them:

For her to share her story was very meaningful to me, and that’s something that she’s done this year. She went and did it when the school opens, with the whole
district staff. So, all the teachers and everybody was able to hear that, and it resonated with a lot of my teachers.

When the researcher spoke with Participant 6, he told a story of his superintendent’s willingness to really understand the story of others. In describing his superintendent’s interaction with others and how his superintendent uses his humanness in these situations, he stated,

So, it’s kind of that lens of compassion, how he talks about [looking through] the viewfinder. So, he’s like, “You got to click it over to compassion, click it over to curiosity.” So, I’m always thinking, “Okay, click it over.” How is this person thinking or where are they coming from when they come to me? (Participant 6)

In understanding the story of others, Participant 4 explained the support he received from his superintendent when he first started in the role of elementary principal sharing,

So that level of empathy or understanding leads to the trust and of course, with the openness and the conversation that I know she knows what she’s talking about, and I know she cares and wants not only what’s best for me as a new principal, but also the school. Talk about vested interest.

According to participants in this study, a major theme in the Domain: Openness is seeing exemplary superintendents model their own humanness and vulnerability.

Participants told stories of how their superintendent modeling vulnerability in sharing their own stories created a culture of openness that builds trust with members of the leadership team.
Summary

This chapter provided a detailed review of the purpose statement, research question, and methodology, including the data collection process, population, and sample. A comprehensive presentation and analysis of the findings developed from the data included interviews with 16 participants.

This study was designed to explore what behaviors exemplary superintendents practice that build and maintain trust, as experienced by principals, during leadership team meetings based on the facets of trust described by Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (benevolence, reliability, competency, honesty, and openness). Fourteen themes emerged from the data and were aligned with each of the five facets of trust.

Chapter V presents a final summary of the study, including major findings, unexpected findings, and conclusions as a result of the study. The findings and conclusions are followed by implications for action, recommendations for further research, and concluding remarks and reflections.
CHAPTER V: FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to identify and describe behaviors exemplary superintendents practice during leadership team meetings to build and maintain trust with their principals based on the facets of trust defined by Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (benevolence, reliability, competency, honesty, and openness).

The entire population for this study was the approximate 9,700 principals in California, as indicated by the California Department of Education ([CDE], 2018), who serve public schools. The target population included six districts with 39 principals who have exemplary superintendents in Sonoma or San Mateo Counties. For this study, identifying an exemplary superintendent was based on the meeting criteria outlined in The Schools Superintendent Association National Superintendent of the Year including Leadership for Learning, Communication, Professionalism, and Community Involvement. County superintendents, retired superintendents who are active in professional organizations, professional search firms, and university professors were asked to identify exemplary superintendents based on the criteria.

A sample of 16 principals with 2 years or more in serving with the same exemplary principal and with at least 4 years of administrative experience were identified and interviewed for this study between September 27, 2019 and October 29, 2019.

Major Findings

Following the data collection and using the facets of trust defined by Tschannen-Moran and Hoy that include benevolence, reliability, competency, honesty, and openness, the researcher made the following assertions of how trust is built and maintained between principals and exemplary superintendents during leadership team meetings.
Finding 1

*Communicating with principals consistently in writing and in-person.*

This study identified six themes related to this finding with a total frequency of 195 indicating that superintendents build trust through strong communication with all members of their leadership team. Communication was valued by principals in both verbal and written formats. A key finding indicated that a written communication following each leadership team meeting was valuable in holding all members of the leadership team accountable. The importance of strong communication from the superintendent to principals cannot be overstated as was evidenced by the frequency of responses (195) related to this finding. The data reflected the importance of superintendents who also took time to call or follow up after a meeting with principals who may have needed additional support.

Finding 2

*Creating opportunities for team building and communal sharing whereby principals feel served and valued.*

Superintendents build trust through nurturing open communication and consistently creating opportunities for team building and communal sharing. This study identified three themes related to this finding with a total frequency of 102. It was clear that creating opportunities for team building and communal sharing was the foundation for demonstrating benevolence during leadership team meetings. The simple act of providing food and beverages for a weary leadership team after an entire day on the school site was greatly appreciated by study participants. The data reflected that creating a nurturing environment where principals felt valued allowed for a comfort level in which
difficult conversations could take place without judgment and with the full support of the superintendent was critical to building trust within the team.

Finding 3

*Superintendents sharing personal experience in complex decision-making allowing principals to learn from experiences of their superintendents.*

The data strongly suggested that superintendents build trust through sharing personal experiences from their past that involved complex decision-making. The study identified two themes related to this finding with a frequency of 52. The ability of the superintendent to explain and elaborate on the process that they went through in making complex decisions, both with positive and negative outcomes, was viewed as a way for superintendents to demonstrate their competency, therefore building trust with principals.

Finding 4

*Superintendents intentionally, regularly, and carefully listen to the voices and perspectives of their principals.*

Building trust requires superintendents to intentionally, regularly, and carefully listen to the voices and perspectives of principals. By listening to principals, superintendents not only gained a greater depth of understanding regarding the everyday work of principals, it also allowed them to develop a level of empathy and support that was valued by principals. The data indicated that both reliability and openness are increased when superintendents have the “back” of their principals and are also willing to discuss difficult or controversial topics with members of their leadership team. This finding was strongly articulated in two themes with a frequency of 66.
Finding 5

Superintendents build trust with their leadership teams when they consistently follow through in all aspects of interactions with principals.

This study found that superintendents build trust when there is consistent follow-through in all aspects of interactions with principals. This level of follow-through was instrumental in demonstrating the reliability of the superintendents and was confirmed in three themes with a frequency of 97. Following through with both words and actions proved instrumental in building and maintaining of trust with principals. Follow-through was most valued through individual meetings following leadership team meetings when principals were able to have one-on-one time with their superintendent. An additional trust-building strategy was for principals to regularly send communications to principals outlining important actions taking place across the district.

Finding 6

Superintendents build trust when they demonstrate vulnerability and empathy by listening with an open heart and open mind.

Superintendents build trust when they demonstrate vulnerability and empathy by listening with an open heart and open mind when interacting with their principals. Data from this study revealed that superintendents who were willing to tell stories of their own life experiences built trust relationships with their principals through vulnerability. These life stories resonated deeply with principals and provided a deep connection through honesty and openness. The study found that superintendents who were willing to share their own humanness by demonstrating care and compassion for principals were able to
build strong trust relationships with principals. This finding was based on data articulated in three themes with a frequency of 80.

**Finding 7**

*Superintendents build trust by owning the truth and looking for collaborative ways to productively move forward.*

By boldly modeling how to turn missteps into opportunities to collaborate and seek input from principals, superintendents build trust by owning the truth and looking for ways to productively move forward. Data from this study indicated that when a superintendent made an error in judgment or action, it was most beneficial for that superintendent to share their thinking with principals, seeking both input and possible solutions. This finding was articulated by study participants clearly in one theme with a frequency of 19.

**Finding 8**

*Principals gain trust in their superintendents when they know they can speak freely without worry of judgment.*

Superintendents build trust when they encourage principals to give input freely during leadership team meetings without fear of repercussion. This study revealed that principals gained trust in their superintendent when they knew that they had the freedom and encouragement to speak openly without worry of judgment from their superintendent. As explained by study participants, this level of openness on the part of the superintendent created a welcoming environment where principals felt empowered to speak their truth regardless of the topic. This finding was articulated by 12 study participants in one theme with a frequency of 25.
Using the facets of trust defined by Tschannen-Moran and Hoy as a framework for this study, the researcher isolated eight findings. This study found that exemplary superintendents build and maintain trust with principals during leadership team meetings by the following:

- Initiate a communication plan with principals;
- Creating opportunities for team building and communal sharing;
- Sharing personal experiences in complex decision-making;
- Listening to principals carefully with intentionality;
- Following through consistently in all aspects of interactions with principals;
- Demonstrating vulnerability and empathy by listening with an open heart and open mind;
- Modeling how to turn missteps into opportunity;
- Empowering principals to freely give input without fear of repercussion.

**Unexpected Findings**

This study revealed one unexpected finding. In meeting with study participants, the researcher found that superintendents who truly cared about their staff members, who were there for their staff members in times of personal or professional turmoil, were deeply respected and cared for in return. This act of caring by superintendents in reaching out to individuals, sending a card or text message, sending a meal or simply sending a brief note built trust throughout the organization. The superintendents who were described in this study put relationship building at the top of their agenda for each and every meeting, and while there were times that the content of the meeting may have been challenging or contentious, these meetings ended with a type of checkout where
individuals were able to share something positive about members of the leadership team. In the end, it was really all about relationships, compassion, and the simplicity of kindness toward each other.

**Conclusions**

Based on the research findings of this study and connected to the literature, the researcher drew eight conclusions that bestow deeper insight into trust building between superintendents and principals.

**Conclusion 1**

*Systems of written and in-person communications between principals and superintendents benefit all members of the leadership team.*

Based on the finding that superintendents who consistently communicate with principals both in writing and in person build trust with members of their leadership team, superintendents would benefit from developing systems in which communications are strategically sent to leadership team members and dates are calendared for on-site visits. As the work of superintendents is complex and time-consuming, having members of their cabinet, who may include assistant superintendents and directors, assist in writing communications after leadership team meetings would be beneficial. Research from this study pointed to the great importance of open and honest communications between principals and superintendents (West & Derrington, 2009) and the overall benefits of this level of communication positively affecting the culture of the district.
Conclusion 2

*Trust building happens when superintendents intentionally build time into the meeting agenda for welcoming activities, team building and informal sharing between colleagues.*

Based on the data that superintendents build trust through nurturing open communication, creating opportunities for team building, and communal sharing, the researcher concluded that successful trust building happens when superintendents intentionally build time into the meeting agenda for welcoming activities, team-building time, informal sharing between colleagues, and celebrations of success. The strong correlation between creating environments, where team members feel welcomed and valued, cannot be overstated as clearly affirmed in the literature (T. Harvey & Drolet, 2006; Kim, Hanna, & Dotres, 2019; West & Derrington, 2009).

Conclusion 3

*Superintendents build trust when they share past experiences in complicated decision-making.*

Concluding that in order to build strong and trusting teams that persevere through turbulent times, superintendents must be open and honest in sharing personal experiences from their past that involve complex decision-making is based on the finding that superintendents build trust through sharing their own personal experience in complicated decision-making. Decision-making is multifaceted when there are numerous competing factors. In a multiple case study, exploring the decision-making processes of public school superintendents, research by Russell (2017) concluded that professional experience was by far the greatest perceived influence on study superintendents’
decision-making. Data from this study found principals valued a superintendent’s past experience with decision-making and felt it was invaluable to their own decision-making.

**Conclusion 4**

*In order to be a transformational leader, superintendents need to intentionally build time into every principal meeting to seek multiple perspectives.*

Participants in this study overwhelmingly felt that superintendents who were willing to carefully listen to the voices and perspective of principals when coming to a conclusion led to trust being built and maintained with their superintendents. Fourteen of sixteen study participants articulate the importance of listening closely to members of their leadership team. These data led to the conclusion that in order to be a transformational leader who values every member of the organization, superintendents need to intentionally and regularly build time into each leadership team meeting with principals to seek multiple perspectives. Trust building during leadership team meetings took many forms but none more important than a superintendent who was willing to truly listen to their principals and, at times, to listen to critical but needed feedback.

**Conclusion 5**

*Superintendents are able to build and maintain trust when there is consistent follow-through in all aspects of interactions with principals.*

In order to reduce ambiguity and reinforce long and short-term commitments to the principals, successful superintendents prioritize the needs and requests of principals and then follow-through before, during, and after leadership team meetings. The literature identified the importance of effective communication and honoring commitments between principals and superintendents resulting in successful partnerships.
Similarly, this study concluded that superintendents are able to build and maintain trust when there is consistent follow-through in all aspects of interactions with principals.

**Conclusion 6**

*Superintendents need to create meeting environments where vulnerability is welcomed and empowerment is celebrated.*

Based on the finding that superintendents build trust when they demonstrate vulnerability and empathy by listening with an open heart and open mind when interacting with their principals, it can be concluded that in order to avoid toxic work environments where individuals are not valued, successful superintendents can create trust by sharing their own stories of vulnerability and empower their principals to do the same with an open heart and mind. In demonstrating their vulnerabilities, superintendents serve as inspirational leaders who care about all staff. In groundbreaking research by Brené Brown (2012), she discussed the need for vulnerability in connecting people and the great challenges we face in demonstrating vulnerability. She stated, “That’s the paradox here: *Vulnerability is the last thing I want you to see in me, but the first thing I look for in you*” (p. 113). As leaders, superintendents can create environments where vulnerability is welcomed and empowerment is celebrated.

**Conclusion 7**

*Superintendents build trust by modeling how to turn missteps into opportunities and by acting with humility.*

Based on the finding that superintendents build trust by boldly modeling how to turn missteps into opportunities to collaborate and seek input from principals, it can be
concluded that in order to be creative and problem solve K-12 challenges in the 21st century, superintendents build trust by modeling how to turn missteps into opportunities and by acting with humility. Hough (2011) suggested, “A realistic view of one’s self and organization leads to the ability to learn from mistakes, and humble leaders view failures as part of learning. Humble leaders seek diverse views and counsel in decision-making” (p. 19). Data from this study concur with the philosophy articulated by Morris, Brotheridge, and Urbanski (2005) that leaders who balance their strengths and weakness as well as their willingness to admit mistakes create an environment that encourages supportiveness toward others within the organization.

**Conclusion 8**

Superintendents should allow and trust principals to co-develop and facilitate leadership team meetings.

In order to assist principals in fostering and developing their own leadership skills, superintendents allow and trust principals to codevelop and facilitate meetings without fear of repercussions. Research from this study indicated that superintendents cannot be afraid to relinquish control of the leadership team meetings to trusted principals regardless of the topics principals feel the need to discuss. The literature widely acknowledges the importance of allowing opportunities for open and honest dialogue between principals and their superintendent (Anderson, 2016; Hvidston, McKim, & Holmes, 2018; Kellogg, 2017). This conclusion is based on the finding that superintendents build trust when they empower principals to freely give input during leadership team meetings even if the topic is controversial.
Implications for Action

In light of the phenomenological study and the critical need for trust to form the foundation of successful and productive interactions between superintendents and principals, the researcher recommends the following implications for action. These recommendations are directed toward school leaders including school board members, district superintendents, school principals, schools of education, and statewide educational organizations. For change to occur on the local level, entire school districts from school board trustees to classroom teachers and to all staff members who work with students, trust must form the foundation of all interactions.

Implication for Action 1

Superintendents communicate after leadership team meetings, summarizing topics and highlighting action steps.

Based on the conclusion that superintendents would benefit from developing systems in which communications are strategically sent to leadership team members and dates are calendared for on-site visits, it is recommended that templates are designed for written communications that are easily used and quickly distributed. Time should be allocated at each leadership team meeting for these types of communications to be outlined for easy distribution, summarizing topics from the meeting including action steps. Additionally, dates for upcoming site visits should be confirmed at leadership team meetings. It is also imperative that district-level staff also create time in their calendars to visit sites. Research by Honig et al. (2017) discusses the fundamental importance of district-level administrators attending to sites with a focus on support
instructional leadership. School sites would benefit from this type of district-level support that is a direct follow-up to the leadership team meetings.

**Implication for Action 2**

*Superintendents intentionally build unstructured time into meeting agendas for collaboration as well as specific activities for open and honest conversations.*

Based on the data from this study, the researcher concluded that successful trust building happens when superintendents intentionally build time into the meeting agenda for welcoming activities, team-building time, informal sharing between colleagues, and celebrations of success, it is recommended that superintendents work collaboratively with members of their cabinet and leadership team in creating meeting agendas that include opportunities for both unstructured time for collaboration between colleagues and specific activities that foster open and honest conversations. In developing effective agendas that include unstructured time for collaboration and then specific activities for open and honest conversations, superintendents will develop a culture of trust during leadership team meetings. In supporting this work, it is further recommended that as part of ongoing professional growth, superintendents should consider participating in conferences, course work, and/or professional organizations at the county, state, and national level that include opportunities related to trust building and support of principals.

**Implication for Action 3**

*Leadership team retreats are held where team members develop the mission, vision, and core values for their leadership team meetings.*

Based on the conclusion that in order to build strong and trusting teams that persevere through turbulent times, superintendents must be open and honest in sharing
personal experiences from their past that involve complex decision-making. It is recommended that school boards consider and approve an annual budget for a 2-day retreat where superintendents and principals develop the mission, vision, and core values for leadership team meetings that include valuing individuals and sharing personal stories in an open and safe environment. During this retreat, it is recommended that norms for leadership team meetings including codevelopment of agenda items and allowing all members of the leadership team to facilitate and lead meetings.

**Implication for Action 4**

*Specific question-and-answer time is included as part of the leadership team meeting agenda designed for maximum and authentic input from principals.*

Based on the conclusion that in order to be a transformational leader who values every member of the organization, superintendents should intentionally and regularly build time into each leadership team meeting with principals to seek various perspectives. It is recommended that superintendents outline agenda items in which decisions are required and then develop a specific question and answer process to gather various perspectives from principals. This type of question and answer session must be designed for maximum and authentic input by principals in order to truly hear their perspectives. Principals should be given information regarding these decision-making agenda items prior to the meeting for maximum impact input. Additionally, it would prove beneficial for superintendents to work closely with schools of education in sharing their ideas and perspectives on how inclusion of principals in decision-making impacts the culture of trust in leadership team meetings. The more schools of education work more directly with school district leaders, the stronger and more aligned educational programs will be
in addressing the facets of trust researched in this study. Data from this study indicated that when principals are more involved in decision-making, they become fully engaged members of the leadership team, contributing to the organizational trust within the school district.

**Implication for Action 5**

Superintendents spend time at school sites for one-on-one meetings with principals including follow-up topics from leadership team meetings.

Based on the conclusion that in order to reduce ambiguity and reinforce long and short-term commitments to the principals, successful superintendents prioritize the needs and requests of principals and then follow-through before, during, and after leadership team meetings. It is recommended that superintendents spend 90 minutes each month with principals at their school sites to better understand the needs of those principals and their schools. Meeting with principals can include addressing issues or topics from the leadership meeting and can also include discussions regarding the day-to-day operations of the school. Data from this study indicated the importance of superintendents spending time in one-to-one meetings with principals at their school sites; therefore, superintendents must build time into their weekly scheduled to follow up directly with principals.

In addition to meeting with principals at their school sites, superintendents must continue strong and transparent communication before, during, and after the leadership team meetings. A written communication would allow superintendents to reconfirm action steps from the leadership team meeting and to share information from all of the district-level departments. These actions including reaching out to principals through
in-person and through written communication were exhibited by all exemplary superintendents in this study. Both schools of education and professional organizations such as the Association of California School Administrators (ACSA) would benefit by offering content in addition to the California Professional Standards for Educational Leaders that focuses on trust building based on consistent follow-through by superintendents with their principals.

**Implication for Action 6**

*Superintendents share stories of their own vulnerability in order to empower their principals to do the same.*

Based on the finding that superintendents build trust when they demonstrate vulnerability and empathy by listening with an open heart and open mind when interacting with their principals and the conclusion that in order to avoid toxic work environments where individuals are not valued, successful superintendents can create trust by sharing their own stories of vulnerability in order to empower their principals to do the same with an open heart and mind. It is recommended that school board trustees invest in annual retreat time for school and district leaders to spend time working on trust building with a focus on the mission, vision, and core values for the district. During this retreat, superintendents should consider modeling, promoting, and valuing vulnerability by sharing their own stories with members of the leadership team.

Through this leadership opportunity, superintendents should create an atmosphere where members of the leadership team have opportunities to share their own stories of success and challenge. Superintendents should model vulnerability by sharing their own life experiences that led them to their current role. In serving as inspirational leaders who
care about all staff, superintendents should also consider sharing their experiences at annual statewide conferences hosted by the CDE. Conferences hosted by the CDE with a focus on the inclusion of all students such as the annual Multi-Tiered System of Support conference would be an excellent venue for this sharing.

**Implication for Action 7**

Superintendents and principals work collaboratively in the creation of a protocol to review the outcomes of events that have taken place in the district.

In order to be creative and problem solve K-12 challenges in the 21st century, superintendents build trust by modeling how to turn missteps into opportunities, it is recommended that school district leaders create an after action review protocol for use with team members in addressing the outcome of a difficult situation that has taken place in the district. Furthermore, principals and superintendents will use these protocols to work collaboratively with members of the leadership team in embracing how the team reacts when outcomes occur that were not planned. An after action review asks teams to reflect on “What just happened?” “Why did it happen?” and “What have we learned?” In order for superintendents and principals to be creative, responsible risk-takers in support of innovative learning practices, a culture of admitting to missteps and then reflecting on those actions must be a part of the leadership team culture. In further support of innovation, it is recommended that the superintendent, working with the support of the board of trustees, should fund instructional leadership training leading to exemplary practices in innovation and risk-taking in the district.
Implication for Action 8

Superintendents designate principals to serve as leadership meeting conveners and facilitators.

Based on the finding that superintendents build trust when they empower principals to freely give input during leadership team meetings without fear of repercussion and the conclusion that in order to help principals foster and develop their own leadership skills, superintendents should allow and trust principals to codevelop and facilitate meetings without fear of repercussions. It is recommended that superintendents designate principals to serve as leadership team meeting conveners and facilitators. Principals would work with their colleagues to create the agenda, adding topics of interest to principals to the meeting agenda. Additionally, superintendents should create an annual budget that includes professional growth opportunities for principals focused on their areas of interest including curriculum development, human resources, or fiscal management as examples. As principals become more knowledgeable in their areas of interest, they will better manage and facilitate leadership team meetings.

Recommendations for Further Research

Based on the findings of this study, the researcher recommends further research in the following areas in order to expand the understanding and knowledge of trust building between exemplary superintendents and principals.

1. Extend the phenomenological study to include larger districts where the time in which superintendents meet with principals is limited because of the size of the district and the responsibilities of the superintendent. There is a gap in understanding regarding
the best strategies superintendents can utilize to build and maintain trust with their principals.

2. Replicate the study at the high school level. In some cases, the size of the high school can be comparable to the size of an entire elementary school district, with similar responsibilities. It would be valuable to explore the strategies exemplary superintendent utilize in building trust with high school principals.

3. Undertake a comparative study of trust building between exemplary superintendents and principals of elementary school districts in additional counties in California taking the demographics and socioeconomics of the county into consideration.

4. Explore the trust relationship between superintendents and principals and the correlation it has on student achievement in the classroom through a mixed methods study.

5. Utilize a longitudinal mixed methods study following principals throughout their careers and their trust-building partnerships with their superintendents asking if there is a correlation between tenure and trust.

6. Undertake a study that includes what trust means to teachers and students and how this trust relationship impacts the site principal. Determine whether there is a correlation between trust at the school site and how this affects trust building between that principal and their superintendent.

7. Utilizing a mixed methods approach, explore the relationship of trust building focused on the multigenerational workplace. School districts are multigenerational and how trust is perceived by members of the school district would lead to greater insights on how trust is built and maintained with age-diverse communities.
8. Develop a case study focused on the role of trust in building relationships with millennials in the workplace. This study could focus on the superintendent-principal or the principal-teacher trust-building relationship.

9. Conduct a correlation study to investigate the impact of psychological safety and building trust in teams.

Concluding Remarks and Reflections

In my role as a superintendent I believe that nothing is more important than the relationships that I have formed with all members of the school community—relationships built on a foundation of trust. My relationships extend to school board trustees, classroom teachers, support staff, administrators, parents, and community members who serve in roles that I deeply respect. I could not do the work that I do without strong relationships and I value each and every relationship I have created.

Trust takes many forms and is built and nurtured in a variety of ways as I learned through my research. I learned that the most trusted and respected superintendents regularly act with humility and are not afraid to show that they, too, are vulnerable. I have the deepest respect for those leaders who are willing to “step into the arena” and walk the talk. I have also learned in my close to 11 years serving as a superintendent, as difficult decisions need to be made and people have trust in one, they are much more willing to engage in these conversations, listening with an open heart and open mind.

Three years ago, I began this journey thanks to my friend Walt Buster who encouraged me to change jobs and be bold in participating in this doctoral program. I did both. In joining a new school district as their “lead learner,” I reflected on the fact that it took me close to 6 years in my previous district to create leadership team meetings that were
effective for principals. I wanted to learn more about why principals felt these meetings were effective, and the bottom line was trust—trusting their superintendent would consistently “do right” by the students and families in the district and “do right” by them. I wanted to hear from more principals about their leadership team experiences and what creates trust in their superintendents. I am thankful for the openness and honesty expressed by the principals in this study and grateful for the opportunity I had in spending time with each of them. This dissertation is the outcome of that study.

As I close this dissertation, I am thankful for all the students who have been in my care. They have taught me more than I could ever learn in a lifetime. I am also thankful for the opportunities I have been given in working with the most incredible principals I know, both in Hillsborough and Sonoma Valley. I am excited and inspired by their work and commitment to making impactful learning for students their top priority. These principals are hardworking and intelligent and model what it means to love their students and staff each and every day.
REFERENCES


# APPENDIX A

## Synthesis Matrix

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Interview Questions and Research Questions Alignment

1. Competence is the ability to complete responsibilities effectively. A competent leader completes responsibilities in a timely fashion, leading others in the organization to attain the goals and vision of the organization, and demonstrates skills needed to perform their job well.
   a. In what ways does your superintendent demonstrates competency during leadership team meetings?
   b. How would you describe the relationship between your superintendent demonstrating competency and your level of trust in your superintendent?

2. Benevolence is concern for others including demonstrations of kindness. Benevolent leaders support the vision of an organization, acknowledging the successes and contributions of staff, and expresses interest in the well-being of others.
   a. What examples can you share of how your superintendent models benevolence during your leadership team meetings? What does benevolence look like and feel like to you?
   b. How do you feel the members of the leadership team responds when your superintendent models benevolence?

3. Reliable leaders are consistent, dependable and deliver on what is required or expected.
   a. In what ways does your superintendent model reliability during leadership team meetings? How do you respond when your superintendent acts with reliability?
   b. Other examples of reliability include delivering on what is required or expected. Can you describe an example of a time when your superintendent acted with reliability during a leadership team meeting?

4. Openness is the extent to which information is revealed through open communication, shared decision-making, delegating and sharing power.
   a. What actions does your superintendent take in including members of the leadership team in planning or facilitating leadership team meetings?
b. How do you respond when your superintendent acts with openness during your leadership team meetings? How do other members of the leadership team respond?

c. How does your superintendent exhibit openness during leadership team meetings? This can include but is not limited to: shared decision-making, delegating or sharing power.

5. Honesty is a combination of character, integrity and authenticity. An honest leader accepts responsibility for his or her actions without distorting the truth or shifting blame to others.

a. In what ways does your superintendent model honesty during leadership team meetings? Can you give an example of what took place and how that made you feel?

b. Are you able to share an example of a time when your superintendent exhibited honesty when they perhaps made a mistake or had a mishap in judgment?

i. You provided great insight on being honest. How frequently do you see this happening? Is there an intentional attempt to be honest/build transparency as a superintendent?

6. The five facets of trust defined by researcher Megan Tschannen-Moran including benevolence, reliability, competency, honesty, and openness. Can you share your experiences during your leadership team meetings which you feel trust is built with your superintendent?

a. What actions or behaviors exhibited by your superintendent builds trust with you or members of your leadership team?

b. What actions or behaviors exhibited by your superintendent maintains trust with you or members of your leadership team?

7. What practices would you associate with the superintendent’s success in building and maintaining trust between the principals and the superintendent during leadership team meetings?
Demographic and General Questions
8. Gender
9. How many years have you served as an administrator?
10. How many years have you served as an administrator in your current district?
11. Please describe a typical leadership team meeting. How often do you meet and who attends your leadership team meetings?

Research Central Question

The research central question for this study was, “What behaviors do exemplary superintendents practice that build and maintain trust, as experienced by principals during leadership team meetings, based on the facets of trust described by Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (benevolence, reliability, competency, honesty, and openness)?”

Research Subquestions

Sub RQ1: What behaviors do exemplary superintendents practice during leadership team meetings that build and maintain trust, as experienced by principals, based on benevolence?

Sub RQ2: What behaviors do exemplary superintendents practice during leadership team meetings that build and maintain trust, as experienced by principals, based on reliability?

Sub RQ3: What behaviors do exemplary superintendents practice during leadership team meetings that build and maintain trust, as experienced by principals, based on competency?

Sub RQ4: What behaviors do exemplary superintendents practice during leadership team meetings that build and maintain trust, as experienced by principals, based on honesty?

Sub RQ5: What behaviors do exemplary superintendents practice during leadership team meetings that build and maintain trust, as experienced by principals, based on openness?
**Alignment Chart**

**Research Questions #**

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RCQ = Research Central Question

SRQ = Sub Research Question
APPENDIX C

BUIRB Approval

BUIRB Application Approved As Submitted: Louann Carломагно

MyBrandman <my@brandman.edu> to me, Jeffrey, buirb, Vikki Aug 9, 2019, 7:54 AM

Dear Louann Carломагно,

Congratulations, your IRB application to conduct research has been approved by the Brandman University Institutional Review Board. This approval grants permission for you to proceed with data collection for your research. Please keep this email for your records, as it will need to be included in your research appendix.

If any issues should arise that are pertinent to your IRB approval, please contact the IRB immediately at BUIRB@brandman.edu. If you need to modify your BUIRB application for any reason, please fill out the "Application Modification Form" before proceeding with your research. The Modification form can be found at the following link: https://irb.brandman.edu/applications/modification.pdf.

Best wishes for a successful completion of your study.

Thank you,
Doug DeVore, Ed.D.
Professor
Organizational Leadership
BUIRB Chair
ddevore@brandman.edu
www.brandman.edu
APPENDIX D

E-Mail Requesting the Names of Exemplary Superintendents
From County Superintendents

From: Louann Carlomagno
Subject: Dissertation Research on Trust Building between Superintendents and Principals
To: County Superintendents from Sonoma and San Mateo Counties (TBD)
Date: TBD

Dear Superintendent,

My name is Louann Carlomagno and I am a doctoral candidate from the Ed.D. Program in Organizational Leadership at Brandman University. I am conducting a study on the behaviors exemplary superintendents’ exhibit during leadership team meetings which build and maintain trust with principals based on benevolence, reliability, competency, honesty, and openness.

I would greatly appreciate your assistance in identifying superintendents in your county whom you consider exemplary based on the following criteria:

- Leadership for Learning—creativity in successfully meeting the needs of students in his or her school system.
- Communication—strength in both personal and organizational communication.
- Professionalism—constant improvement of administrative knowledge and skills, while providing professional development opportunities and motivation to others on the education team.
- Community Involvement—active participation in local community activities and an understanding of regional, national, and international issues.

I will be asking for the names of exemplary superintendents from additional references including university professors, professional search firms and prominent law firms who work in your county.

I would love to discuss my topic further and encourage you to ask any questions you may have that may help you understand how this study will be performed and/or how it may affect you. If you have any questions, comments, or concerns about the study you are encouraged to contact Louann Carlomagno at or by phone at; or Dr. Jeffery Lee, Dissertation Chairperson, at. (email address and phone number removed for privacy)

Sincerely,
Louann Carlomagno
APPENDIX E

E-Mail Requesting the Names of Exemplary Superintendents
From University Professors

From: Louann Carlomagno
Subject: Dissertation Research on Trust Building between Superintendents and Principals
To: University Professors
Date: TBD

Dear Professor ____________,

My name is Louann Carlomagno and I am a doctoral candidate from the Ed.D. Program in Organizational Leadership at Brandman University. I am conducting a study on the behaviors exemplary superintendents’ exhibit during leadership team meetings which build and maintain trust with principals based on benevolence, reliability, competency, honesty, and openness.

I would greatly appreciate your assistance in identifying superintendents in Sonoma and/or San Mateo County whom you consider exemplary based on the following criteria:

- Leadership for Learning—creativity in successfully meeting the needs of students in his or her school system.
- Communication—strength in both personal and organizational communication.
- Professionalism—constant improvement of administrative knowledge and skills, while providing professional development opportunities and motivation to others on the education team.
- Community Involvement—active participation in local community activities and an understanding of regional, national, and international issues.

I will be asking for the names of exemplary superintendents from additional references including county superintendents, professional search firms and prominent law firms who know superintendants in Sonoma and/or San Mateo County.

I would love to discuss my topic further and encourage you to ask any questions you may have that may help you understand how this study will be performed and/or how it may affect you. If you have any questions, comments, or concerns about the study you are encouraged to contact Louann Carlomagno at or by phone at; or Dr. Jeffery Lee, Dissertation Chairperson, at. (email address and phone number removed for privacy)

Sincerely,
Louann Carlomagno
APPENDIX F

E-Mail Requesting the Names of Exemplary Superintendents
From Superintendent Search Firms

From: Louann Carlomagno
Subject: Dissertation Research on Trust Building between Superintendents and Principals
To: Superintendent Search Firm (TBD)
Date: TBD

Dear ________________,

My name is Louann Carlomagno and I am a doctoral candidate from the Ed.D. Program in Organizational Leadership at Brandman University. I am conducting a study on the behaviors exemplary superintendents’ exhibit during leadership team meetings which build and maintain trust with principals based on benevolence, reliability, competency, honesty, and openness.

I would greatly appreciate your assistance in identifying superintendents in Sonoma and/or San Mateo County whom you consider exemplary based on the following criteria:

- Leadership for Learning—creativity in successfully meeting the needs of students in his or her school system.
- Communication—strength in both personal and organizational communication.
- Professionalism—constant improvement of administrative knowledge and skills, while providing professional development opportunities and motivation to others on the education team.
- Community Involvement—active participation in local community activities and an understanding of regional, national, and international issues.

I will be asking for the names of exemplary superintendents from additional references including county superintendents, university professors and prominent law firms who know superintendents in Sonoma and/or San Mateo County.

I would love to discuss my topic further and encourage you to ask any questions you may have that may help you understand how this study will be performed and/or how it may affect you. If you have any questions, comments, or concerns about the study you are encouraged to contact Louann Carlomagno at or by phone at; or Dr. Jeffery Lee, Dissertation Chairperson, at. (email address and phone number removed for privacy)

Sincerely,

Louann Carlomagno
APPENDIX G

E-Mail Requesting the Names of Exemplary Superintendents  
From Retired Superintendents

From: Louann Carlemagno  
Subject: Dissertation Research on Trust Building between Superintendents and Principals  
To: Retired Superintendents  
Date: TBD

Dear ________________,

My name is Louann Carlemagno and I am a doctoral candidate from the Ed.D. Program in Organizational Leadership at Brandman University. I am conducting a study on the behaviors exemplary superintendents’ exhibit during leadership team meetings which build and maintain trust with principals based on benevolence, reliability, competency, honesty, and openness.

I would greatly appreciate your assistance in identifying superintendents in Sonoma and/or San Mateo County whom you consider exemplary based on the following criteria:

- Leadership for Learning—creativity in successfully meeting the needs of students in his or her school system.
- Communication—strength in both personal and organizational communication.
- Professionalism—constant improvement of administrative knowledge and skills, while providing professional development opportunities and motivation to others on the education team.
- Community Involvement—active participation in local community activities and an understanding of regional, national, and international issues.

I will be asking for the names of exemplary superintendents from additional references including county superintendents, university professors and superintendent search firms who know superintendents in Sonoma and/or San Mateo County.

I would love to discuss my topic further and encourage you to ask any questions you may have that may help you understand how this study will be performed and/or how it may affect you. If you have any questions, comments, or concerns about the study you are encouraged to contact Louann Carlemagno at or by phone at; or Dr. Jeffery Lee, Dissertation Chairperson, at. (email address and phone number removed for privacy)

Sincerely,
Louann Carlemagno
APPENDIX H

Letter to Exemplary Superintendents Requesting Permission to Collect Data From Site Principals

From: Louann Carломagno
Subject: Dissertation Research on Trust Building between Superintendents and Principals
To: Exemplary Superintendent (TBD)
Date: TBD

Dear Superintendent ________________,

My name is Louann Carломagno and I am a doctoral candidate from the Ed.D. Program in Organizational Leadership at Brandman University. I am conducting a study on the behaviors exemplary superintendents’ exhibit during leadership team meetings which build and maintain trust with principals based on benevolence, reliability, competency, honesty, and openness.

I have used a panel of experts who experience in school district leadership and you were selected as an exemplary superintendent based on the following criteria:

- Leadership for Learning—creativity in successfully meeting the needs of students in his or her school system.
- Communication—strength in both personal and organizational communication.
- Professionalism—constant improvement of administrative knowledge and skills, while providing professional development opportunities and motivation to others on the education team.
- Community Involvement—active participation in local community activities and an understanding of regional, national, and international issues.

I would greatly appreciate the opportunity to meet with you to discuss my topic further and encourage you to ask any questions you may have that may help you understand how this study will be performed and/or how it may affect you.

After speaking with you, I would like to request permission to communicate with your principals who meet the eligibility criteria for my study, asking for their participation. The criteria for participation includes:

- having worked with you for the past two years;
- having served as an administrator for four years.

My research will involve formal interviews and the collection of printed related artifacts. Interviews will last approximately 45 to 60 minutes.
I look forward to hearing from you, and anticipate our further communications on this research project.

If you have any questions, comments, or concerns about the study you are encouraged to contact Louann Carlomagno at or by phone at; or Dr. Jeffery Lee, Dissertation Chairperson, at (email address and phone number removed for privacy)

Sincerely,
Louann Carlomagno
APPENDIX I

Letter to Principals Requesting Participation in the Study

Date _____________
Dear Principal ________,

My name is Louann Carinemagno and I am a doctoral candidate from the Ed.D. program in Organizational Leadership at Brandman University. I am conducting a study on the behaviors exemplary superintendents exhibit during leadership team meetings which build and maintain trust, as experienced by principals, based on benevolence, reliability, competency, honesty, and openness. Through a rigorous identification process, your superintendent has been identified as exemplary and I would like to hear your perception on the building and maintaining trust during your district leadership team meetings with your superintendent. I have been in contact with your superintendent and they are aware of the study and supportive of me reaching out to you.

I also want to thank you for serving as a site principal. I served in this role for six years and found it both challenging and rewarding. I know your work is never done, so I would greatly appreciate your time in participating in this study. Should you agree, participation in this study will take approximately 1 hour of your time. I will arrange an on-site 45- to 60-minute individual audio recorded interview with you at a time and location of your choosing. Your participation in this study will be a confidential process. You will not be personally identified in the study and your anonymity will be protected. Further details on the purpose of the study, confidentiality, informed consent, benefits and risks, and participant rights are attached to this letter.

I would love to discuss my topic further and encourage you to ask any questions you may have that may help you understand how this study will be performed and/or how it may affect you. If you have any questions, comments, or concerns about the study you are encouraged to contact Louann Carinemagno at or by phone at; or Dr. Jeff Lee, Advisor, at; (email address and phone number removed for privacy).

Please contact me through your preferred method of communication with your agreement to participate so I can arrange a convenient time for the interview.

Your contribution to this important area of study is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,
Louann Carinemagno
Doctoral Candidate
(email address and phone number removed for privacy)
APPENDIX J

Brandman University Institutional Review Board: Research Participant’s Bill of Rights

Any person who is requested to consent to participate as a subject in an experiment, or who is requested to consent on behalf of another, has the following rights:

1. To be told what the study is attempting to discover.
2. To be told what will happen in the study and whether any of the procedures, drugs or devices are different from what would be used in standard practice.
3. To be told about the risks, side effects or discomforts of the things that may happen to them.
4. To be told if they can expect any benefit from participating and, if so, what the benefits might be.
5. To be told what other choices they have and how they may be better or worse than being in the study.
6. To be allowed to ask any questions concerning the study both before agreeing to be involved and during the course of the study.
7. To be told what sort of medical treatment is available if any complications arise.
8. To refuse to participate at all before or after the study is started without any adverse effects.
9. To receive a copy of the signed and dated consent form.
10. To be free of pressures when considering whether he/she wishes to agree to be in the study.

If at any time you have questions regarding a research study, you should ask the researchers to answer them. You also may contact the Brandman University Institutional Review Board, which is concerned with the protection of volunteers in research projects. The Brandman University Institutional Review Board may be contacted either by telephoning the Office of Academic Affairs at (949) 341-9937 or by writing to the Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, Brandman University, 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA, 92618.
APPENDIX K

Informed Consent Form

INFORMATION ABOUT: Trust Building between Principals and Exemplary Superintendents during Leadership Team Meetings

RESPONSIBLE INVESTIGATOR: Louann Carlomagno, Ed.D. Candidate

PURPOSE OF STUDY: You are being asked to participate in a research study conducted by Louann Carlomagno, Ed.D. Candidate, a doctoral student in the Brandman University School of Education, part of the Chapman University system. The purpose of this research study is to explore the culture of trust building between principals and exemplary superintendents during leadership team meetings.

This phenomenological study focuses identifying and describing behaviors principals experience during district-level leadership team meetings which build and maintain trust with their superintendent based on the facets of trust described by Tschannen-Moran and Hoy.

Data for this study will consist of interviews and artifacts. As such, this study is significant in the following ways: First, this study will contribute to existing body of literature which examines how trust is developed and maintained between principals and their superintendent (Hatchel, 2013; Howard, 2014; Kellogg, 2017; West & Derrington, 2009) by specifically focusing on the trust behaviors principals experience district-level meetings. Second, this study is significant in that it will identify ways in which superintendents demonstrate benevolence, reliability, competency, honesty, and openness and during leadership team meetings addressing the facets of trust described by Tschannen-Moran and Hoy. Third, this study will significantly add to the understanding of the role of trust in school settings expanding the work of Battle (2007) and Tschannen-Moran (2014) based on the trust behaviors exhibited by leaders during district-level meetings.

Furthermore, this study is significant to practitioners in the field as it will assist principals in understanding how to build and maintain trust with their faculty, ultimately supporting classroom teachers in building and maintaining trust with their students.

The findings of this study significantly will add the understanding practitioners have in the field on how trust is built and maintained through specific actions taken by the superintendent. Exploring how a trust relationship is built and maintained during leadership team meetings will lend important insight into what superintendents can do to better support the overall work of their site leaders while simultaneously modeling what site leaders should do to build trust with their teachers.

By participating in this study, I agree to participate in a one-on-one interview, focus group and/or artifact gathering. The one-on-one interview will last between 45 and 60
minutes and will be conducted in person. This research will begin and conclude between August 2019 and November 2019.

I understand that:

a) There are minimal risks associated with participating in this research. I understand that the Investigator will protect my confidentiality by keeping the identifying codes and research materials in a locked file drawer that is available only to the researcher.

b) The possible benefit of this study to me is that my input may help add to the research in defining the factors which build and maintain trust between principals and their superintendent during leadership team meetings.

c) If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact Jeffrey Lee, Ed.D. at (email address and phone number removed for privacy)

d) My participation in this research study is voluntary. I may decide to not participate in the study and I can withdraw at any time. I can also decide not to answer particular questions during the interview if I so choose. I understand that I may refuse to participate or may withdraw from this study at any time without any negative consequences. Also, the Investigator may stop the study at any time.

e) No information that identifies me will be released without my separate consent and that all identifiable information will be protected to the limits allowed by law. If the study design or the use of the data is to be changed, I will be so informed and my consent re-obtained. I understand that if I have any questions, comments, or concerns about the study or the informed consent process, I may write or call the Office of the Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, Brandman University, at 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA 92618, (949) 341-7641.

I acknowledge that I have received a copy of this form and the “Research Participant’s Bill of Rights”. I have read the above and understand it and hereby consent to the procedure(s) set forth.

_____________________________________________________
Signature of Participant or Responsible Party

_____________________________________________________
Signature of Principal Investigator

_____________________________________________________
Date
APPENDIX L

Audio Recording Release & Consent Form

INFORMATION ABOUT: Trust Building between Principals and Exemplary Superintendents during Leadership Team Meetings

RESPONSIBLE INVESTIGATOR: Louann Carlomagno, Ed.D. Candidate

RELEASE: I understand that as part of this study, I am participating in an interview which will be audio recorded as a digital file, per the granting of my permission.

I do not have to agree to have the interview audio recorded.

In the event that I do agree to have myself audio recorded, the sole purpose will be to support data collection as part of this study.

The digital audio recording will only be used for this research. Only the researcher and the professional transcriptionist will have access to the audio file. The digital audio file will be destroyed at the end of the study. The written transcription of the audio file will be stored in a locked file drawer and destroyed three years following completion of this study.

I understand that I may refuse to participate in or I may withdraw from this study at any time without any negative consequences. Also, the investigator may stop the study at any time. I also understand that no information that identifies me will be released without my separate consent and that all identifiable information will be protected to the limits allowed by law. If the study design or the use of the data is to be changed, I will be so informed and my consent obtained. I understand that if I have any questions, comments, or concerns about the study or the informed consent process, I may write or call the Office of the Vice Chancellor Academic Affairs, Brandman University, 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA 92618 Telephone (949) 341-7641. I acknowledge that I have received a copy of this form and the Research participant’s Bill of Rights.

CONSENT: I hereby give my permission to Louann Carlomagno to use audio recorded material taken of me during the interview. As with all research consent, I may at any time withdraw permission for audio recording of me to be used in this research study.

Signature of Participant: ________________________________ Date: ______________

Signature of Principal Investigator: _______________________ Date: ______________
APPENDIX M

Operational Definitions
The five facets of trust defined by researcher Megan Tschannen-Moran including benevolence, reliability, competency, honesty, and openness.

1. Benevolence is concern for others including demonstrations of kindness. Benevolent leaders support the vision of an organization, acknowledging the successes and contributions of staff, and expresses interest in the well-being of others.

2. Reliable leaders are consistent, dependable and deliver on what is required or expected.

3. Competence is the ability to complete responsibilities effectively. A competent leader completes responsibilities in a timely fashion, leading others in the organization to attain the goals and vision of the organization, and demonstrates skills needed to perform their job well.

4. Honesty is a combination of character, integrity and authenticity. An honest leader accepts responsibility for his or her actions without distorting the truth or shifting blame to others.

5. Openness is the extent to which information is revealed through open communication, shared decision-making, delegating and sharing power.

Leadership Team Meetings are defined as the meetings which are held on a regular basis with the superintendent, district-level administrators and site principals and assistant principals.
APPENDIX N

National Institutes of Health Certification

Certificate of Completion

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) Office of Extramural Research certifies that **Louann Carlomagno** successfully completed the NIH Web-based training course "Protecting Human Research Participants."

**Date of Completion:** 05/19/2018

**Certification Number:** 2823761