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Running head: SELF-CARE AND RENEWAL

Ph.D. Educational Studies with a Specialization
in Educational Leadership

The Perceptions of Private Special Education School Leaders Regarding Their Role in
Promoting Self-Care and Renewal Practices for Themselves and Their Teachers

A Dissertation Presented

by

Theresa Melito-Conners

Submitted to the Graduate School of Education
Lesley University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

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School of Education

The Perceptions of Private Special Education School Leaders Regarding Their Role in
Promoting Self-Care and Renewal Practices for Themselves and Their Teachers

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Graduate School of Education
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Ph.D. Educational Studies
Educational Leadership Specialization

Approvals

In the judgment of the following signatories, this Dissertation meets the academic standards that have been established for the Doctor of Philosophy degree.

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Abstract

This qualitative study examined the perceptions of private special education school leaders regarding their role in promoting self-care and renewal. There is limited research on self-care and renewal in schools. Data were gathered through surveys and interviews that addressed three guiding research questions: (a) Do school leaders consider self-care and renewal practices to be important for themselves and their teachers? (b) What are the various ways school leaders report they promote self-care and renewal practices for themselves and their teachers? (c) What do school leaders believe to be the factors and conditions that inhibit and foster their efforts to implement self-care and renewal practices for themselves and their teachers? The data analysis process uncovered the following: (1) school leaders believe self-care and renewal practices are more important for their teachers than themselves, (2) importance of self-care and renewal practices that school leaders expressed does not correlate to the amount of time they spend promoting self-care and renewal practices for themselves or their teachers, (3) school leaders and their teachers would likely benefit from specific, tailored plans developed to address the area of self-care and renewal, (4) school leaders should share their self-care and renewal practices with their teachers, (5) school leaders should promote self-care and renewal practices in a routine way built into the school culture, (6) school leaders could benefit from practicing mindful leadership and reflective practices, (7) time constraints limit school leaders and teachers to promote self-care and renewal activities, (8) learning the importance of taking care of yourself comes with age. The implications of these findings, future research, and recommendations are outlined.

Keywords: self-care, renewal, special education, educational leadership, general education, private special education, approved private special education schools, school leaders, selfcare, well-being, wellbeing, teachers, leaders, administrators.

Dedication

My supportive and loving husband, Jeff Conners
and my inspirational mother, Anna Maria Melito

Acknowledgments

Many individuals have contributed to my success in this process. First, I am grateful for my doctoral committee. They pushed me to expand my thinking and encouraged me throughout this process. Dr. Gould, my senior advisor, has been a constant supporter and guide. Dr. Kaplan showed an interest in my work during his course on Adult Learning and Development and provided thoughtful feedback and insight during this process. Dr. Abblett's contributions and expertise assisted me greatly. I am appreciative that he was able to be a part of this committee. I have been an admirer of Dr. Abblett's work for many years.

Being a part of the Lesley University Doctoral Program has been an honor. This program has opened my eyes and contributed to my learning in new and exciting ways. The dedicated professors and staff are second to none, and my 2016 cohort members are the greatest cheerleaders. Special recognition goes to my partner in crime, Jacquelynne Chase for her unwavering encouragement and support, and to my honorary cohort member, Jackie Masloff who was a great sounding board and coding tutor during this process.

I am especially appreciative for the private special education school leaders who shared their time and experiences with me for this study. I hope that this study provides insight into self-care and renewal practices for you and your teachers. You have a hard job to do, but you do it so well. No matter where this journey takes me, I will always have a place in my heart for the private special education schools who work with the most challenging and vulnerable children.

I want to thank my mentors, who have helped and supported me along the way. There are far too many to name, but I would like to mention a few including Maryann Hichar, Doreen Ward, Vincent D'Antona, Mary Ni, Pamela Travers, James Major, and Jane Hardin. I would not be where I am today with their encouragement, support, and willingness to listen over the years.

Last, but certainly not least, I am forever grateful for the endless support I received from my mother, Anna Maria and my husband, Jeff. Anna Maria is a fearless educator who believes all students can learn and has helped thousands of students reach their potential throughout her career. Jeff is an unwavering supporter who was always willing to go the extra mile so that I could be successful in this journey. This was not an easy road, and I would not have gotten through it without them. Lastly, my friends and colleagues, you no longer must listen to updates regarding this process! Thanks for always inspiring me to keep going.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

“Caring for myself is not self-indulgence; it is self-preservation” (as cited in Kisner, 2017, para. 5). The rallying words of political activist and African American lesbian writer Audre Lorde in 1988 are necessary today in our education system while our leaders and teachers are being stretched beyond their limits. The challenges that educators face are well documented. Increasing policy demands, overflowing classes, administering standardized assessments, student misbehavior, lack of support, the absence of collegial relationships, and insufficient knowledge from leaders and policymakers about what occurs in a classroom make this profession particularly difficult (Anderson, 2010; Kieschke & Schaarschmidt, 2008; Reichl, Wach, Spinath, Brünken & Karbach, 2014; Santoro 2018). When these aspects of teaching are combined with working with a special education population of students, the challenges are dramatically increased, and the risk of stress and burnout are amplified. Special education teachers manage the duties of a general education teacher plus they are required to address the individual and unique needs of every student, team demands and manage a caseload (Ansley, Houchins & Varjas, 2016).

In Massachusetts, there is a designation of schools known as approved private special education schools. These schools are approved by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) under the states special education law Chapter 766 (About, 2018). Additionally, many of these schools run residential programs licensed by the Department of Early Education and Care (EEC). Almost all of the Chapter 766 schools in Massachusetts are members of the trade association known as the Massachusetts Association of Approved Private Schools (**maaps**). **maaps** represents approximately 156 day and residential programs. Collectively, **maaps** member schools serve approximately seven-

thousand students and employ nearly ten-thousand staff across all programs. **maaps** member schools handle the most challenging students in the Commonwealth and beyond with a variety of complex, individualized needs. Students come from all over the world in some cases to attend **maaps** member schools. These schools are highly specialized and outfitted to handle the multitude of difficulties their students face.

In my role as the Director of Member Assistance and Development at **maaps**, I regularly hear concerns from the leaders and teachers in the private special education schools concerning their well-being. These concerns range from retention, morale, job satisfaction, stress, compassion fatigue, secondary traumatic stress, demoralization, and burnout. The leaders are looking for ways to support their teachers and their well-being. The teachers in the private special education schools typically work longer days, a longer school year and are paid less than their public school counterparts even though they adhere to the same credentials and educator licensure requirements set forth by DESE. I believe that leaders and teachers in private special education schools can benefit greatly from a variety of self-care and renewal practices incorporated into their daily lifestyle both professionally and personally.

I have experienced firsthand the benefits that come from routinely practicing self-care and renewal practices. As a young woman, I have overcome the trauma that is associated with growing up with an abusive father and an abusive dating relationship during my early twenties. I have also battled disordered eating since I was a teenager. For me, self-care and renewal practices have been an important part of my well-being and health for many years.

Childhood and young adult trauma coupled with working in a **maaps** member high school program back in 2011 as the Guidance Coordinator showed me that I needed to take better care of myself. The stress associated with working with the special education population

of adolescents with intense social-emotional and mental health needs quickly began to take its toll on me. It was difficult to find a work-life balance, and I realized that this was not sustainable. Searching for solutions is where my interest and research into self-care began.

When I have practiced various forms of self-care and renewal regularly, I have received the benefits. However, it is easy to let life and other responsibilities prevent one from taking care of one's self. Speaking from experience, I do not always make myself a priority, and I suffer the consequences such as increased stress, anxiety, decreased motivation, exhaustion, disordered eating, and general unhappiness. Self-care is often neglected, and the first activity that gets dismissed when other responsibilities arise. Currently, leaders, teachers, other helping professionals and people, in general, do not make self-care and renewal a priority, and they may suffer as a result (Anderson, 2010; Drago-Severson & Blum-DeStefano, 2015; Skovholt & Trotter-Mathison, 2016).

Chapter One is devoted to explaining the nature of this study and it is divided into the following sections: statement of the problem; purpose of the study including the research questions that guided the study; definitions of key terms; significance of the study; delimitations of the study; an overview of the bodies of literature reviewed; design of the study; and an outline of the five dissertation chapters.

Statement the Problem

It was estimated that during 2018, the teacher shortage could exceed 100,000 nationwide (Santoro, 2018). Both general and special education teachers are leaving the field at a substantial rate creating a multitude of challenges in our schools (Billingsley, 2014). However, the annual attrition rate for special education teachers is double (13%) compared to that of general education teachers, and the three-year attrition rate is approximately 25%. Also, 20% of special

education teachers annually transfer to general education positions or different positions in special education (Billingsley 2014; Wong, Ruble, Yu, & McGrew, 2017). This is true for both hard to staff and well-resourced schools (Santoro, 2018).

A survey conducted by the United States Department of Education indicated that teachers experienced intense dissatisfaction, which contributed to their decision to leave (Santoro, 2018). This dissatisfaction included issues with administration, lack of support, feeling isolated, no autonomy or input regarding mandated standardized assessments, accountability measures, new initiatives, and general unhappiness with working conditions (Santoro, 2018). The cost of teacher dissatisfaction is high for schools, including sick pay and substitute teachers costs (Anderson, 2010; Santoro 2018; Wong et al., 2017). Attrition expenses in the United States for school districts is up to \$2.2 billion a year (Seidel, 2014).

Being a teacher ranks as one of the most stressful and demanding professions. Classroom environments have been compared to hospital emergency rooms with regards to stress level (Jennings, 2019). Jennings (2019) explained that teaching is “defined by increasing unrealistic expectations, extensive meetings, and other instructional demands, and difficult conversations with principals, administrators, and parents” (p. 6). This is the daily reality of teaching and research has shown that functioning in overly stressful environments without properly taking care of oneself is very unhealthy (Cook-Cottone, 2017; Jennings, 2019; Skovholt & Trotter-Mathison, 2016). This can lead to many health issues ranging from cardiovascular disease, high blood pressure, weakened immune system, depression, sleep disorders, burnout, disordered eating, and exhaustion (Cook-Cottone, 2017; Reichl et al., 2014).

By practicing self-care and renewal regularly, one’s overall health is improved in a multitude of ways (Cook-Cottone, 2017). From reducing stress and anxiety, increasing immune

system functionality and longevity, to improved concentration, energy, and quality of life, self-care and renewal practices are extremely valuable tools to utilize (Ansley et al., 2016; Cook-Cottone, 2017; Skovholt & Trotter-Mathison, 2016; Kabat-Zinn, 2015). This is true regardless of one's profession, but particularly if someone is in a high-stress role like a school leader or teacher (Ansley et al., 2016; Kahn & Saulo, 1994; Skovholt & Trotter-Mathison, 2016; Youngs, 1993).

The term renewal as coined by John Goodlad referred in part to the overall preparation of teachers and teacher education. This concept speaks to the burnout, and negative emotions teachers are experiencing today given the unrealistic demands on their time as well as a teacher's ability to adapt to the ever-changing environment of a school. Joined with self-care, renewal can be a powerful support when practiced routinely (Drago-Severson & Blum-DeStefano, 2015).

A small fraction of the literature and research available supports self-care and renewal practices in schools, but it is mostly directed at the student's well-being and not the well-being of leaders or teachers. Furthermore, little to no research has been done in the private special education school arena where the population of students is 100% special education, and the negative aspects of teaching can be amplified.

It is reasonable to assume that if private special education school leaders make self-care and renewal a priority for themselves and their teachers, the staff turnover will decrease, morale will improve, and teachers will be able to devote more time to the improvement of student learning (Anderson 2010; Drago-Severson & Blum-DeStefano, 2015; Santoro, 2018). Leaders and teachers need to practice self-care and renewal if they are to be effective and remain effective teachers (Skovholt & Trotter-Mathison, 2016).

When leaders are exploring and determining approaches to increasing teacher quality and improving student outcomes, they should consider the mental health and well-being of the educators themselves as these issues are all intertwined (Wong, et al., 2017). “The current results clearly show that teacher burnout and stress are not only intrapersonal and fiscal issues for teachers and administrators, but they are problems that affect students at the individual level” (Wong et al., 2017, p. 423). This exploration should address a teacher’s need to be supported by their colleagues and the leaders of their school. Leaders also need to take care of themselves in the process as they are not immune to the stressors of the occupation, and their well-being impacts the school culture (Anderson, 2010; Santoro, 2018).

There are many experts from the earliest Buddhist practitioners to modern-day scholars like Jon Kabat-Zinn in the field of self-care and renewal, and they would agree that an important aspect of any self-care practice or routine is that it is daily or regularly occurring. It is not something to be grasped at when one is feeling stressed or overwhelmed or something employed as a quick-fix remedy to a pervasive problem (Cook-Cottone, 2015). Skovholt and Trotter-Mathison (2016) noted in their research that taking care of oneself is often very challenging for helping professionals. Because teachers, like other helping professionals, do not put themselves first, this struggle often impedes a teacher’s ability to access self-care and renewal practices (Skovholt & Trotter-Mathison, 2016). Teachers need to be made more aware of the fact that they have to take care of themselves to care for others and properly nurturing their own needs actually makes one more effective at helping others (Skovholt & Trotter-Mathison, 2016).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to learn about the lived experiences and perceptions of private special education school leaders regarding their role in promoting self-care and renewal practices for themselves and their teachers.

First, this study examined the value and importance private special education school leaders place on self-care and renewal practices for themselves and their teachers and how much of a priority this is for leaders considering all their other responsibilities. This study also sought to understand the amount of time private special education school leaders devoted to helping themselves and their teachers improve their self-care and renewal practices. Furthermore, this study investigated the various ways that private special education school leaders report they promoted self-care and renewal practices and this study examined the factors and conditions that inhibit and foster the efforts of private special education school leaders.

To achieve these goals, this study addressed the following three guiding research questions:

1. Do private special education school leaders consider self-care and renewal practices to be important for themselves and their teachers?
2. What are the various ways private special education school leaders report they promote self-care and renewal practices for themselves and their teachers?
3. What do private special education school leaders believe to be the factors and conditions that inhibit and foster their efforts to implement self-care and renewal practices for themselves and their teachers?

Definition of Terms

The following terms are used throughout this study. The meaning of each term as it pertains to this study is defined below.

Perceptions: The opinion, belief, or lived experience of a person regarding their role. In the case of this study, the perceptions of private special education school leaders are examined.

Private special education school leaders: These are leaders in the **maaps** member schools approved by DESE, which could include Executive Directors, Program Directors, Principals, Assistant Principals, Education Directors, and more.

Self-Care Practices: “Self-care is defined as the daily process of being aware of and attending to one’s basic physiological and emotional needs including the shaping of one’s daily routine, relationships, and environment as needed to promote self-care” (Cook-Cottone, 2017, p. 297).

Renewal Practices: The dictionary defines renewal as the act of renewing. The verb renew is defined as to make like new again or restore freshness. John Goodlad was the first to coin the term educational renewal which pertains to teachers continuously adapting to change, monitoring their effectiveness, and adjusting when necessary to their practice (Mantle-Bromley & Goodlad, 2004). Renewal is not to be confused with terms such as reform or restructuring.

The Significance of the Study

There is limited research on applying self-care and renewal practices for school leaders and teachers to improve their well-being and effectiveness. This study added important information to the existing body of literature on self-care and renewal practices and was directed at providing insights into the perceptions of private special education school leaders regarding their role in promoting self-care and renewal practices for themselves and their teachers.

My interest in this topic is driven by my wish to support private special education school leaders and teachers by providing them with an understanding and information that will improve their well-being and assist them in practicing and promoting self-care and renewal practices for

others. Ideally, this study could inspire private special education school leaders to take care of their teachers and themselves more effectively to decrease staff turnover, increase staff morale, improve working conditions, and positively impact student learning. By making self-care and renewal practices a priority in the school for leaders and teachers, they may be able to alleviate some of the negative aspects associated with working with such a challenging population of students in a demanding setting.

Ultimately, because of this study, private special education school leaders and other educational leaders may be more informed about the benefits of promoting self-care and renewal practices which would, in turn, lead to lifestyle changes fostering happier and healthier leaders and teachers. As an educational leadership student, it is my sincere hope that this study helps to inform the preparation of future educational leaders and advise effective practices for leading and teaching in private special education schools. If leaders are equipped with the skill set necessary to foster and promote self-care and renewal practices for themselves and others, they can address the stressors that accompany their roles proactively. In addition to those listed previously, this study is particularly relevant and important to additional staff in private special education schools, leadership and teacher preparation programs, state agencies, policymakers, professional and trade associations, other school settings such as public schools and charter schools, teacher unions, and students.

Delimitations of the Study

An effort was made to limit the sample of the participants to leaders in private special education day schools who are current members of **maaps**. These schools serve a special education population of students providing services until the student graduates or ages out of special education eligibility, which in Massachusetts is 22 years old. Therefore, this study did not

look at the following as part of the sample: leaders or teachers who work in the residential component of a **maaps** member program, or leaders or teachers who work in a different educational setting such as a public school, religious school or charter school.

Another delimitation was the time available for the data collection. Given the time constraints of this study, no self-care and renewal practices were implemented to evaluate their impact. This study focused on the self-reported perceptions of private special education school leaders and their role in promoting self-care and renewal practices for themselves and their teachers. Teachers were not interviewed for this study, and leaders were not asked questions about other staff in their programs aside from the teachers in their day school program. Some of the interviewees work for programs that include more than a day school, such as a residential program.

Review of the Literature

A comprehensive review of the literature is included in this study to provide the foundation for the research that was conducted. Chapter Two summarized the bodies of research on self-care and renewal practices as well as examined the role of the school leader and the challenges leaders and educators face. The bodies of literature studied are organized into the following main sections: history of self-care and renewal; benefits of self-care and renewal; components of or approaches to self-care and renewal; and factors and conditions that promote and inhibit self-care and renewal practices for teachers and specifically the role of the school leader in fostering and promoting self-care and renewal practices for themselves and others including controversies that surround self-care and renewal practices.

Eastern civilizations earliest yoga practitioners date back 2000-5000 years ago with additional ties and evidence of the importance of caring for the self to Ancient Greece, Rome, the

Middle Ages, and the Renaissance as well as 17th and 18th-century writings in Western civilization (Keeping, 2002; Pandurangi, Keshavan, Ganapathy & Gangadhar, 2017).

Also, the specific components of self-care and renewal practices are explored for leaders and teachers. Newbrough (1983) suggested structured time, physical exercise, making time for special relationships, maintaining enthusiasm, celebrating, professional support and engagement as some of the methods, teachers can use to ward off burnout. Feeling socially, emotionally and physically safe in a school is key to the success of leaders, teachers, and students combined with a shared vision and a supportive school climate (Cohen, McCabe, Michelli, & Pickeral, 2009). More specifically, the literature was examined to learn the various ways the school leader may foster or may be an obstacle to the occurrence of self-care and renewal practices. Various approaches and benefits of self-care and renewal are explored, including nutrition and intuitive eating, exercise, mindfulness, meditation, yoga, breathing exercises, and Reiki. “In Buddhism, it is believed that we suffer not from what is happening, but due to our relationship with what is happening” (as cited in Cook-Cottone, 2015, p. 70). Self-care practices are critical in figuring out how one responds to the various stressors that educators face in life. Skovholt and Trotter-Mathison (2016) emphasized that “self-care is always important. At times of personal crisis or excessive stress, when the ability to function well may be severely compromised, it is even more important” (p. 129).

An examination of the current factors and conditions that challenge general and special education teachers including challenging students, working conditions, chronic stress, lack of autonomy and resources, teacher preparation, and novice teacher isolation is also provided along with the negative effects of these current challenges such as burnout, feeling demoralized, compassion fatigue, elevated stress levels, and disordered eating. School-level factors and

conditions that promote self-care and renewal such as re-vitalization and re-moralization, resiliency, and support from colleagues are investigated, plus those factors and conditions that inhibit self-care and renewal such as lack of awareness, and knowledge about self-care and renewal are scrutinized in the literature review.

Lastly, any controversies associated with self-care and renewal practices are discovered. This section explored what the naysayers highlight about self-care and renewal which ranges from concerns that it has become a money-making industry removed from its original essence or even worse, that the allure of self-care and renewal practices can mask a serious medical issue that may go untreated under the care of a medical doctor.

Design of the Study

The design of the study begins with an explanation regarding the rationale for the choice of design. The section continues with the selection of the participants, site description, and development of the instruments used. The method used to collect, organize, analyze, and code the data is explained in detail.

Rationale

This research study was a qualitative phenomenology which according to Creswell and Poth (2018) is to find the common meaning in “the lived experiences of several individuals of a concept or phenomenon” and to make sense of it or interpret it in its natural setting (p. 76). Like a poet or an artist, a phenomenological researcher believes that the phenomena have something to say to us and are tasked with sharing the insights of others with the world (Groenwald, 2004). “Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 7). A qualitative phenomenological researcher is concerned with the social and psychological phenomena involved (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Groenwald, 2004).

In this study, the common phenomenon explored was the lived experiences of leaders in private special education schools and their perception of their role in promoting self-care and renewal. More specifically, through the guiding research questions, the researcher investigated how leaders view self-care and renewal as a priority and what are the various ways they promote self-care and renewal practices for themselves and their teachers. Lastly, the factors and conditions that promote and inhibit their efforts to implement self-care and renewal practices were studied.

The basic principle of a phenomenological study is to reduce a phenomenon to its essence (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 76). By studying private special education school leaders regarding their role in promoting self-care and renewal practices for themselves and their teachers, the researcher was able to narrow the lived-experience down to its core truth, or its essence.

Participants and Site Description

A purposeful sampling strategy was utilized for this study, specifically criterion sampling, which is used for quality assurance purposes (Creswell & Poth, 2018). It is essential that all participants possess a shared lived experience of the phenomenon. All the participants in this study were private special education school leaders in **maaps** member schools.

Before the study began, the researcher sought approval from the **maaps** Board of Directors in October 2018 to conduct this study utilizing private special education school leaders and the approval of the Human Subjects Committee at Lesley University. Since the researcher works for **maaps**, she was known to the participants in a professional capacity, which was disclosed in the correspondence seeking participation from the leaders.

All participants were recruited through the **maaps** member database of educational leaders. This list included leaders in private special education schools located outside of

Massachusetts. However, only Massachusetts school leaders elected to participate. This list included 350 professionals that the **maaps** member schools designated as their main education contacts. All 350 were invited to partake in the survey. Of the 350, 70 leaders participated in this study. The participants represent a variety of roles, including Executive Directors, Program Directors/Principals, and Education Directors in the day school programs. There were no additional participation criteria to be eligible for this study.

Development of Instruments

During this qualitative study, Qualtrics was used to collect the responses of the online survey. Survey responses initially helped to determine the participants to select for a follow-up interview. The online survey tool and interview protocol were designed to provide insight into the three guiding research questions as a result of the extensive review of the literature. No existing instruments were used in this study.

The online survey included two open-ended questions, as well as several Likert-style scale and priority questions. The specific role of the participants was asked as the first survey question to get a sense of who participated. This was followed by four survey questions which directly inquired about what percentage of time leaders devote to self-care and renewal and the level of importance leaders feel self-care and renewal is for themselves and their teachers. This directly addressed guiding research question one to help determine how much of a priority self-care and renewal is for leaders.

Guiding research question two was intended to determine what leaders report they utilize for self-care and renewal practices for themselves and their teachers. To answer this question, there was a series of statements that addressed various self-care and renewal aspects and approaches from the review of the literature. The survey participants were expected to evaluate

each statement on a scale of 1-4 (1=None; 2=Little; 3=Some; 4=Most) in four different areas: the degree to which they felt the behaviors are important; frequency in which they practiced the behaviors; how effective they felt in promoting each behavior for their teachers; and the impact that each behavior had on their well-being and that of their teachers.

Guiding research question three examined the factors and conditions that inhibit and foster their efforts to implement self-care and renewal for themselves and their teachers. To address this question, several survey questions were developed and evaluated how often their teachers express concerns regarding their self-care and renewal on a scale. Additionally, participants ranked various working conditions as outlined in the literature as potential obstacles to self-care and renewal. Two open-ended questions on the survey explored guiding research question three more deeply by asking what changes to their job would help the leaders promote self-care and renewal practices and a second question asked what aspects of their job prohibited leaders from being able to promote self-care and renewal.

The follow-up interview consisted of 17 open-ended questions designed to provide more in-depth insight into the three guiding research questions to fully understand the lived experiences of the participants. These questions further illuminated the data collected from the surveys. Interview participants were asked to describe the benefits of self-care and renewal and any negative aspects. Interviewees were also asked to describe the process they used to determine where to focus their efforts of self-care and renewal as well as any professional development they have had that has been useful for themselves and their teachers with regards to self-care and renewal.

For guiding research question two, the interview participants described a typical day for themselves with regards to self-care and renewal, and how they practice self-care and renewal.

Interviewees were asked to define experiences with self-care and renewal for themselves and their teachers that were effective or satisfying. Additionally, the interviewees were requested to identify what was least effective and explain why.

For guiding research question three, the interviewees responded to questions around what supports they needed, what is a powerful lesson they have learned regarding self-care and renewal, discuss a specific incident where self-care and renewal impacted them as a leader, and they reported on the factors and conditions that inhibit and foster their efforts. This series of questions provided the researcher with a perspective that profoundly explored the phenomena.

Data Collection

The data collected were aligned with the three guiding questions of the study. For this study, data were collected in two ways through an online survey and follow-up interviews. The online survey was created using Qualtrics and emailed to potential participants in the private special education schools through the **maaps** database on December 6, 2018. There were 350 potential participants who received this communication.

The job title of the person completing the survey was collected as this survey was sent to leaders in private special education schools, which included Executive Directors, Education Directors, Program Directors, and more. With permission from the participants, contact email information was collected in the event the participant was selected for a follow-up interview, and if the participant wished to receive a summative report after this study concluded.

After receiving the completed surveys, the researcher reviewed the data from the 70 respondents to select participants to conduct a follow-up interview. Nine interviewees were identified who ranged from high and low practitioners of self-care and renewal from their survey responses. Interviews were scheduled at the participant's convenience and conducted by phone

except for one interview that occurred in-person. Interviews were recorded with participant consent and then transcribed manually. Recordings and transcripts were stored on a password-protected laptop and a secure flash drive only accessible to the researcher.

It was essential for the validity of this study, for bracketing to take place. Bracketing can be defined as “suspending our understanding in a reflective move that cultivates curiosity” (as cited in Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 81). Given the researcher’s connection and experiences with the private special education schools, this was a critical step. The researcher entered into the study without preconceived assumptions about the topic and was open to learning about the shared lived experiences of private special education school leaders (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Data Analysis

Data analysis is a crucial part of any qualitative research. This study followed the steps outlined by Creswell and Poth (2018) which are “preparing and organizing the data for analysis; then reducing the data into themes through a process of coding and condensing the codes; and finally representing the data in figures, tables, or a discussion” (p. 183).

For this study, the process of analyzing the data included a multi-step process. First, data from the surveys were downloaded from Qualtrics and then imported into a Microsoft Excel file. This allowed the researcher to review the data and calculate the averages for each question. Tables and figures were also created to visualize the collected data. Since there were 70 survey respondents, this was helpful to the researcher to explore the data first from the larger group of participants.

Second, the researcher manually transcribed the interviews from the nine interviewees. The transcripts and the open-ended survey question data was uploaded into NVivo. The next stage entailed the researcher organizing the data by guiding research question and identifying

various codes. Saldana (2016) defines a code as “often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language or visual data” (p. 4). Furthermore, Saldana (2016) states that “one of the purposes of coding is to detect patterns in the data” (p. 79).

Once the coding process was completed, the various codes were regrouped and classified into common themes. Creswell (2018) explains that by coding and organizing themes within the data, the researcher can begin to interpret the data. The themes were subsequently translated into significant statements/findings based on the guiding research questions about how participants experience the phenomenon. Through this coding process, the researcher was able to identify the essence of the phenomenon and the shared lived experience of the participants.

Confidentiality

All participants received an informed letter of consent outlining their rights as a participant in this study, including the ability to withdraw their participation at any point (see Appendix A and C). They received this information before taking the survey or being interviewed. The informed consent letter included the purpose of the study, procedures, benefits, potential risks, and contact information for the researcher, the researcher’s senior advisor, and the Human Subject Committee at Lesley University.

Once participants consented and completed the online survey, they were provided with an opportunity to consent a second time to be considered for a follow-up interview (see Appendix C). Again, participants were informed that they could withdraw at any time. Precautions were made and communicated with the participants to ensure their anonymity and confidentiality. All information and data were only accessible to the researcher and stored on a password-protected laptop and a secure flash drive. This study posed no risk to the participants. Since the researcher

is known to the participants, efforts were made to eliminate bias. The next section briefly outlines the five chapters of this dissertation.

Chapter Outline

This dissertation has the following five chapters and content.

Chapter One: Introduction, statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, and the three guiding research questions. Also, definitions of key terms were provided, the significance of the study, and the delimitations of the study. Chapter One also included an overview of the literature and the method for this study and a chapter outline.

Chapter Two: Review of the literature encompassed the history, benefits, and approaches to self-care and renewal practices. Literature about the role and expectations of the school leader was examined. Furthermore, the factors and conditions that promote and inhibit leaders from incorporating self-care and renewal practices into their lives and their school culture for themselves and their teachers were explored. The literature review also incorporated the current factors and conditions that challenge general and special education teachers and any controversies associated with practicing self-care and renewal.

Chapter Three: Method, outlines the design of this qualitative phenomenological study by outlining the rationale for the study, a description of the participants and the instruments used to collect the data (survey and interview). The data collection procedures, analysis, and storage of the data are also explained.

Chapter Four: Findings of this study from both the survey and the follow-up interviews. Tables and figures are used to visualize the data. The findings are organized by the three guiding research questions.

Chapter Five: Summary, Discussion, Future Research, and Final Reflections begins with a summary of Chapters One through Four, followed by a discussion and syntheses of the findings. The researcher's recommendations for future research as a result of this study and final reflections are also presented.

Summary

Chapter One began by describing the problem, explaining the purpose of the study, and introducing the research questions that guided the study. It detailed the significance of the study and the delimitations of the study. The literature review section examined several bodies of literature which included the role of the leader, self-care and renewal practices, and the factors and conditions that inhibit and foster self-care and renewal practices. Also, the literature review provided a synthesis of the current challenges' teachers, and particularly special education teachers face. This chapter included a rationale for the design for this qualitative phenomenological study and provided a snapshot of how the data were collected and analyzed. This chapter concluded with an overview of each of the chapters to follow and this summary.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

The well-being of leaders and teachers in schools needs to be addressed (Anderson, 2010; Drago-Severson & Blum-DeStefano, 2015). “Teachers are leaving the profession at rates that outpace retirements, and that creates unstable conditions that undermine school effectiveness and student learning” (Santoro, 2018, p. 18). There are serious sustainability issues in education with teachers leaving the field, showing more physiological stress than other occupations, and experiencing burnout, demoralization, secondary traumatic stress, and compassion fatigue (Santoro, 2018). The classroom ranks among one of the most stressful environments, and being a teacher is especially stressful (Jennings, 2018). Teachers, leaders, and students function in these environments daily, and it is not conducive to their well-being (Jennings, 2018).

Burnout and stress have been widely connected to various health concerns, including cardiovascular disease, depression, sleep disorders, and exhaustion (Reichl et al., 2014). These consequences that often accompany being a teacher have been associated with a negative impact on student instruction and achievement (Reichl et al., 2014). This is not just a problem in the United States, in Germany nearly half of the teachers retire early or leave on disability because of psychological and psychosomatic disorders (Billingsley, 2014; Reichl et al., 2014).

Through self-care and renewal, leaders and teachers alike can mitigate the negative aspects often associated with teaching such as crippling levels of stress, low morale and job satisfaction, compassion fatigue, and burnout. Self-care and renewal approaches are proven to lessen the effects of chronic stress, improve satisfaction personally and professionally, decrease the likelihood of burnout and increase retention (Billingsley, 2014; Cook-Cottone, 2015; Santoro, 2018).

Chapter Two provides an examination of the critical importance of self-care and renewal for general and special education teachers and the challenges these practitioners face professionally. This chapter is organized into the following sections: definition of self-care and renewal; history of self-care and renewal including a rationale for providing self-care and renewal; benefits of self-care and renewal; challenges to health and well-being in schools; various approaches to providing self-care and renewal; and the factors and conditions that inhibit and promote self-care and renewal, including the role of the school leader, and opposing viewpoints.

Definition of Self-Care and Renewal

For the purposes of this study and literature review, the following definition provided by Cook-Cottone (2017) summarized the meaning of the term self-care, which stresses the importance of self-care as a daily foundational practice for well-being:

Self-care is defined as the daily process of being aware of and attending to one's basic physiological and emotional needs including the shaping of one's daily routine, relationships, and environment as needed to promote self-care. Self-care is the foundational work required for physical and emotional well-being. Self-care is associated with positive physical health, emotional well-being, and mental health. Steady and intentional practice of self-care is protective by preventing the onset of mental health symptoms, job/school burnout, and improving work and school productivity. (p. 297)

Appropriate self-care is individualized for everybody, and there are many different practices associated with self-care (Cook-Cottone, 2017). Approaches to self-care can include yoga, breathing exercises, meditation, mindfulness, exercise, religion, journaling, smudging, positive psychology, craft making, and nutrition. These approaches have been linked to various health

benefits, including lower stress levels, increased happiness, better moods, improved immune system health, and cardiovascular health (Alexander, 2008; Cook-Cottone, 2017; Pandurangi et al., 2017).

To participate in the multi-faceted practice of self-care, “one must cultivate self-awareness and a set of daily practices that are firmly integrated into a routine” (Cook-Cottone, 2015, p. 71). There are many different areas to attend to when thinking holistically about self-care such as nutrition, rest, movement, environmental factors, medical and dental care, and physical health (Cook-Cottone, 2015). While practicing self-care, helping professionals like teachers, learn to care for themselves in kind and healing ways and can “provide attention, loving-kindness, and care to those lives we touch” (Cook-Cottone, 2015, p. 72). Leaders and teachers owe it to themselves and their students to take care of themselves, but helping professionals often struggle with the balance of caring for the other (students) and caring for the self (Skovholt & Trotter-Mathison, 2016). “Caring for yourself, bringing support and healing to [ones] efforts to help others and the larger world in which we live, is an essential daily practice – not a luxury, not some form of self-indulgence” (Cook-Cottone, 2015, p. 3).

Definition of Renewal

Merriam-Webster.com defined the verb renew as to make like new again or restore freshness. Renewal can be thought of as an overarching umbrella term in which self-care is a component. There are many practices that support renewal such as reflection, building relationships with colleagues, collaboration, and professional development. Educational renewal also pertains to teachers continuously adapting to change, monitoring their effectiveness, and adjusting when necessary to their practice (Goodlad, J., Mantle-Bromley & Goodlad, S., 2004). When teachers can see successes big and small with their students, it provides a sense of pride

and renewal for them (Goodlad, 1999). Goodlad (1999) identified that the highpoint and most rewarding aspect of teaching is seeing children learn and equated schools to gardens, where the students are plants to be nourished. This notion sculpted the idea of renewal for educators which relate to the self and how teachers can flourish in a supportive, caring, environment (Goodlad, 1999). Therefore, the plant metaphor is for both students and teachers. When teachers are denied this reward of seeing the student learn, there will be little satisfaction in their work (Goodlad, 1999).

The terms renewal, reform, and restructuring sometimes get confused with one another. However, they are different. “The language and the ethos of renewal have to do with the people in and around schools improving their practice and developing the collaborative mechanisms necessary to better their schools” (Goodlad, 1999, p. 575). Contrary, “the language of reform carries with it the traditional connotations of things gone wrong that need to be corrected...the language is not uplifting” (Goodlad, 1999, p. 574). School reform disregards the aspect of teacher education and preparation (Goodlad, 1999). Goodlad (2002) reported that teacher education and preparation is a neglected enterprise, which leads to a scarcity of classroom teachers. “Many children, especially in our most disadvantaged settings, experience a large number of substitute teachers through their school careers” (Goodlad, 1999, p. 576). This disruption is not conducive to an effective, stable learning environment, and students need stability in the classroom to thrive.

The History and Evolution of Self-Care and Renewal

Self-care can be traced back 2000-5000 years ago, with the earliest yoga practitioners in Eastern civilizations (Pandurangi et al., 2017). Evidence of self-care practices or where the importance of lifestyle impacts one’s health can also be traced to Ancient Greece, Rome, the

Middle Ages, and the Renaissance as well as 17th and 18th-century writings in Western civilization (Keeping, 2002). The Buddhist conceptualization of what flows through one's mind shapes who they become has also been linked to Aristotle who "described an action or doing, as a pathway to becoming" (Cook-Cottone, 2015, p. 60). Socrates later claimed to have been sent by the gods to remind men to "concern themselves not with their riches, not with their honor, but with themselves and with their souls" (Kisner, 2017, p. 2). Thoughts and actions bring about what one becomes or feels.

Psychologists have grappled with the idea of the "self" for decades in their attempts to define it, while researchers have tried to measure it (Cook-Cottone, 2015). How does one perceive the self? The self can be viewed as an entity or as a process (Cook-Cottone, 2015). Buddhist perspectives view the self as a process or a river of ever-changing experience, while more western interpretations view the self as an object (Cook-Cottone, 2015). Regardless of how one defines the self, in helping professions such as teaching, taking care of the self is essential to survival and success inside and outside the classroom (Cook-Cottone, 2015; Skovholt & Trotter-Mathison, 2016).

The concept of self-care was first referenced in the medical field as early as 1859 with Florence Nightingale when she observed that "basic individual hygiene and environmental forces as instrumental determinants of individual and societal health" (Keeping, 2002, p. 67). Later, Dorothea Orem in 1959 utilized the term self-care in her definition of ideal nursing practices for both the nurse themselves to practice as well as promote for their patients (Denyes, Orem, SozWiss, 2001). She advocated that it is essential for nurses to understand the importance of and have "substantive knowledge about self-care and understand that human beings are both the focus of their actions and the agents of their actions" (Denyes et al., 2001, p. 48). Although this

notion was intended for nurses to understand the necessity of self-care for their patients; it is transferable to leaders and teachers in that leaders need to recognize the importance of self-care for themselves and their teachers.

Self-care further gained momentum in the 1980s through the writings of Michael Foucault in 1984 who wrote *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 3* where he referenced self-care through the teachings of Socrates and noted that Socrates reminded men to focus on themselves and not on material goods (as cited in Kisner, 2017). In 1988, African-American lesbian writer Audre Lorde used the notion of caring for oneself as a political rally cry and as a stance against an oppressive culture and a reminder that everyone is worthy of care (Kisner, 2017).

With advances in technology and ease of access to different approaches to self-care today, individuals can actively participate in their health and well-being. Google searches of the term self-care have increased dramatically over the past couple of years, and it has become increasingly mainstream with Fortune 500 companies leading the way by offering employee wellness programs rooted in self-care practices such as mindfulness and meditation (Harris, 2016; Kisner, 2017). Keeping (2002) noted that people want to be better informed and be involved in promoting healthy lifestyles for themselves and their families. “Self-care is accepted as a practical endeavor because it is directed towards bringing about specific regulations of human functioning and development through deliberate result-seeking action under existent or changing environmental conditions” (Denyes et al., 2001, p. 49). Regardless of what someone does for an occupation, self-care is important. The fact that the field of education is one of the most stressful professions further supports the necessity of self-care and renewal for leaders and teachers (Reichl et al., 2014).

The term renewal about education as coined by John Goodlad referred in part to the overall preparation of teachers and teacher education. Goodlad (2002) looked towards the medical field and the preparation of doctors in developing this concept. With medical doctor education and preparation over time concepts became outdated, new schools of thought emerged, and thus, renewal occurred (Goodlad, 2002). With teacher education, Goodlad (2002) noted, “the renewal of teacher education is hindered like no other field by myths derived from yesterday’s knowledge made credible by mandated policies (p. 218). Goodlad (2002) further cautioned and explained, “the neglect of teacher education has contributed to the often naïve tendency of teacher educators to welcome the increased interest of policymakers. But welcome turns to concern when this interest decreases the authority of teacher educators in decisions for which they will be held accountable” (p. 216).

Reflection is another important approach to renewal for leaders and teachers that restores people and is considered a key aspect of personal growth (Skovholt & Trotter-Mathison, 2016). Through reflective practice, educators can improve in their professional practice (Goodlad, 1999; York-Barr, Sommers, Ghore, & Montie, 2006). From an individual perspective, reflection is an underlying process that leads to increased professional competence and from an organizational perspective, reflection is required for the continuous improvement of teaching and learning (York-Barr et al., 2006). Reflective thinking can be traced back to ancient civilizations, but the two most cited contributors to the concept of reflective practice are John Dewey and Donald Schon (Pedro, 2006; York-Barr et al., 2006). Both theorists identified reflection upon experiences as a way to improve efficacy and practice (York-Barr et al., 2006).

Benefits of Self-Care and Renewal

Self-care and renewal approaches have proven benefits that greatly impact one's well-being, including emotional, physical, mental, and spiritual health (Cook-Cottone, 2015; Kabat-Zinn, 2013). There is also research to support the idea that self-care and renewal lengthen one's life expectancy (Kabat-Zinn, 2013). First and foremost, self-care and renewal activities have a dramatic impact on reducing stress and anxiety (Cook-Cottone, 2015; Garnto, 2018; Kabat-Zinn, 2013). Beyond reducing stress and anxiety, self-care and renewal practices improve one's mood, memory, productivity, energy levels, sleep, executive functioning, immune system, lower blood pressure, promote weight loss, provide balance, decrease pain and improve cardiovascular functions (Alexander, 2008; Cook-Cottone, 2017; Cuneo, Curtis, Drew, Naoum-Heffernan, Sherman, Walz & Weinberg, 2011; Kabat-Zinn, 2013; Pandurangi et al., 2017). Furthermore, self-care and renewal practices can be a protectant and preemptive measure against burnout and can improve job and school performance and satisfaction as well as prevent the onset of many mental health symptoms (Cook-Cottone, 2017). "Self-care allows you to bring a healthy and positive presence to your work, in addition to bringing resilience to your life...a teacher who presents as overworked, exhausted, depleted or overly self-sacrificing, even if not articulated, does not inspire" (Cook-Cottone, 2017, p. 324).

Cook-Cottone (2017) defined self-care while focusing on ten domain areas to be addressed through a routine practice to receive optimal benefits. The domains are nutrition/hydration, exercise, soothing strategies, self-awareness/mindfulness, rest, relationships, physical and medical practices, environmental factors, self-compassion, and spiritual practices (Cook-Cottone, 2017). Addressing all domain areas would promote a well-rounded practice of optimal well-being and functionality; however, even addressing a few of the domains can have a

positive impact on one's health (Cook-Cottone, 2017). "A healthy body responds to the unavoidable stress in life better than an unhealthy one" (Cook-Cottone, 2017, p. 327).

When someone is experiencing high levels of stress or experiencing burnout, it can manifest itself in many unhealthy ways in the body from increased blood pressure, pain, weakened immune system, digestion issues, weight fluctuations, fatigue, depression, feelings of unhappiness, disease, disconnection, memory loss, poor judgment, irritability, procrastination, and isolation (Anderson, 2010; Cook-Cottone, 2017; Garnto, 2018; Kabat-Zinn, 2013; Youngs, 1993). During times of elevated stress, the body is stimulated in a way that increases cortisol and adrenaline production activating one's fight or flight response due to the perceived threat (Garnto, 2018). Functioning under these circumstances is not sustainable long term, and it will take a toll on one's health. Through practicing self-care and renewal regularly, one can instead activate their resting and digesting response as opposed to the fight or flight response which is a calm and relaxing response to a stressor or perceived threat (Garnto, 2018). During a fight or flight response, the body reacts in various negative ways such as increased heart rate, blood pressure, blood sugar, and breathing, decreased blood flow to the digestive tract and immunity making one more susceptible to illness and disease (Garnto, 2018). Through regular practice of self-care and renewal, the resting and digesting response is engaged which has health benefits such as decreased heart rate, blood pressure, and breathing, increased blood flow to the digestive tract and increased immunity thus improving one's quality of life, relationships and social networks (Garnto, 2018; Kabat-Zinn, 2013; Cook-Cottone, 2017).

Schools and districts over the past several years have placed a large emphasis on student's well-being, promoting physical and emotional health for students. Mindfulness activities, meditation breaks, yoga poses, stretch breaks, and more have been introduced into

some school curriculums (Cook-Cottone, 2015), Teachers would agree this is in an important endeavor, yet they often neglect themselves in the process. The well-being of our leaders and teachers must be as important as the well-being of the students in our schools (Anderson, 2010). This is true for both general and special education teachers, but special education teachers are even more at risk of the negative consequences often associated with teaching as they tend to deal with a challenging student caseload and perform additional duties in their roles. Ansley et al. (2016) stressed the importance of self-care and renewal for special education teachers in the following:

It is essential for special education teachers to be healthy and able to perform at work. By incorporating evidence-based strategies into their lifestyles, special education teachers can reduce their stress and build their coping skills. Moreover, special education teachers with healthy coping skills will optimize their well-being and performance at work.

(p. 183)

Teachers and helping professionals have a propensity to get overinvolved in the drama of the other and unintentionally neglect their own needs. Self-care and renewal practices like mindfulness and reflection allow the practitioner to bring their attention back to the present moment and recognize the impact of this action on their well-being (Skovholt & Trotter-Mathison, 2016). “One looks for a positive interplay between empathetic attachment to the other and one’s own very important self-care needs” (Skovholt & Trotter-Mathison, 2016, p. 58). Mastery of this concept takes time to cultivate through practice and a routine commitment to self-care and renewal (Skovholt & Trotter-Mathison, 2016). Allegiance to one’s self-care and renewal is a necessary component of other care and doing so promotes a sense of balance for the practitioner (Skovholt & Trotter-Mathison, 2016). “A major goal of professional self-care is to

develop attitudes and activities that serve as natural endorphin boosters and stress hormone reducers...self-care should focus in part on producing feelings of zest, peace, euphoria, excitement, happiness, and pleasure (Skovholt & Trotter-Mathison, 2016, p. 162). Self-care is not something “extra” or “nice to do when one has the time,” it is a critical component of one’s professional and personal identity, and the benefits are abundant (Cook-Cottone, 2015; Kabat-Zinn, 2013; Skovholt & Trotter-Mathison, 2016).

Challenges to Health and Well-Being in Schools

During the 2015-2016 school year, 28% of teachers were absent nationwide for ten or more days, not including days off for field trips, professional development, or other planned activities (Harwin, 2018). Students cannot learn when there are no teachers. “Teachers who are stressed out take more sick days and are less productive when they are at school...which costs school districts an enormous amount of money” (Anderson, 2010, p. 6).

Our teachers are facing challenges in maintaining their health and well-being while trying to do the good-work they hoped to do as teachers. Helping professionals such as teachers struggle with the tension of the “give and take” of self-care and other care. Teachers by nature, “are emotionally attuned to the needs of others...to be successful in the helping professions, we must continually maintain professional vitality and avoid depleted caring...which can be very difficult” (Skovholt & Trotter-Mathison, 2016, p. 5). When teachers fail to do so, they end up in danger of experiencing negative consequences (Cook-Cottone, 2015; Skovholt & Trotter-Mathison, 2016, p. 5). These consequences may include burnout, demoralization, chronic or elevated levels of stress, compassion fatigue, secondary traumatic stress, and disordered eating.

Experiencing Burnout

Burnout has a gradual onset accumulating over time, but it is described as a “state of physical, emotional, psychological, and spiritual exhaustion resulting from chronic exposure or involvement in human service work,” such as teaching (Newell & Nelson-Gardell, 2013). Burnout is a major concern of teachers, and it is estimated that 40% of teachers experience burnout. (Wong, et al., 2017) “For teachers of a student with significant emotional and behavioral problems, the risk of stress and burnout is even higher” (Wong et al., 2010, p. 413). Burnout hurts teachers and in turn, hurts the students. A teacher who is stressed or nearing burnout will likely be less engaged, and more depersonalized with the students, thus impacting achievement (Wong et al., 2017). Paquette and Rieg (2016) noted that the literature is supporting high burnout rates and high attrition rates in education as abundant and being emotionally exhausted is the number one reason why teachers leave the field.

In the 1980s, the term burnout became a popular way to describe exhaustion at work (Skovholt & Trotter-Mathison, 2016). Emotions associated with burnout are: “fatigue, frustration, disengagement, stress, depletion, helplessness, hopelessness, emotional drain, emotional exhaustion, and cynicism” (Skovholt & Trotter-Mathison, 2016, p. 103). Skovholt and Trotter-Mathison (2016) described it as the “extreme hemorrhaging of the self” that is understood by helping professionals like teachers (p. 103). Santoro (2018) further illuminated the term burnout as “the depletion of personal resources that makes the act of teaching intolerable and unsustainable. The source of burnout is in the individual psychology of the teacher who cannot find balance, maintain sufficient boundaries, or withstand the emotional demands of the work” (p. 55). Santoro (2018) noted that there is some debate over the term burnout, and if it is referring to the individual’s ability to cope and a lack of resilience or if burnout is the fault of the social environment in which teachers work and the overwhelming needs of the students.

Regardless of the exact cause, burnout is due to “work overload, lack of control, insufficient rewards, unfairness, and the breakdown of community and value conflict” and it is impacting the field of education (Skovholt and Trotter-Mathison, 2016, p. 104). However, it is important to recognize the difference between burnout and other negatives consequences associated with teaching, such as demoralization as each one possesses different underlying factors (Santoro, 2018).

Demoralization

Many teachers carry with them a sense of civic responsibility for the welfare of others. “For some teachers, a sense of justice, moral obligation, or care for young people or society provides a significant source of their motivation for the work” (Santoro, 2018, p. 31). When teachers feel that they must compromise their moral obligations or values because of a policy or a mandate, they can begin to feel demoralized (Santoro, 2018). Often, demoralization gets labeled as burnout for a teacher and viewed as something they need to work on individually when both burnout and demoralization are systemic of the environment and the working conditions (Santoro, 2108). Santoro (2018) clarified that while burnout is certainly an issue for teachers, it is not the same as and should not be confused with demoralization because burnout does not capture the moral aspect of the teacher’s dissatisfaction or despair with their role. While it is possible for burnout issues to be resolved by the individual reevaluating their resources, issues of demoralization cannot be resolved by resetting boundaries or reallocating personal resources (Santoro, 2018).

Chronic or Elevated Levels of Stress

The fundamental design of the role of an educator can over time lead to “chronic and persistent stress and adversely affect their wellness, job performance, and ultimately student

outcomes” (Ansley et al., 2016, p. 177). A 2017 survey conducted by the American Federation of Teachers found that 61% of educators are always or often stressed, which is double the stress level of other occupations (Aftunion, 2017). Additionally, 58% of educators indicated that their mental health was not good for seven or more days in the last month (Aftunion, 2017). This was a dramatic increase from when this survey was conducted previously in 2015, where 38% of teachers indicated their mental health was not good for seven or more days in the last month (Aftunion, 2017). In two years, between the two surveys, the number of teachers struggling with a variety of mental health issues increased by 20%.

A second study with a nationally representative sample conducted by the nonprofit Center on Education Policy reported that nearly half the teachers indicated they would leave the profession as soon as possible for a better paying job citing that the stress and disappointments associated with teaching are not worth it (Will, 2016). Additional studies conducted in the United Kingdom, Greece, and Germany have yielded similar results (Anderson, 2010; Reichl et al., 2014).

Prolonged periods of stress result in negative health consequences such as high blood pressure, stomach ulcers, and suppressed immune system as well as anxiety, depression, and addiction (Ansley et al., 2016, p. 177). Teachers can feel physically cut off from other adults, and a lack of support from administrators and parents (Youngs, 1993). They often feel like they do not have adequate preparation time to accomplish all that is expected of them, which increases their stress level (Youngs, 1993).

Youngs (1993) defined stress as “the body’s physical, mental, and chemical reaction to circumstances that cause confusion, irritation, or excitement” (p. 3). Stress can have a positive or negative impact depending on how one reacts, but stress is mostly associated with negative

consequences (Youngs, 1993). At its most extreme, stress can be debilitating and can be apparent with many warning signs such as tension, nervousness, heart palpitations, difficulty concentrating, insomnia, headaches, muscle tension, ulcers, upset stomach, sleep difficulties, hopeless feelings, dizziness, loss of sexual interest, irritation, and low energy (Youngs, 1993).

Causes of stress can range from feeling pressure regarding time, working conditions, added responsibilities, lack of reward or appreciation from superiors, unresolved conflicts with colleagues, uncertain expectations, constant change, lack of autonomy, role conflict, no voice in decision making, career development, seemingly pointless meetings, lack of support and interactions with other adults (Cuneo et al., 2011; Youngs, 1993).

Special education teachers are tasked with collaborating with “general education teachers to support students from increasingly diverse backgrounds across tiered systems of support while still providing specialized instruction for students with the most intensive needs” (Shepherd, Fowler, McCormick, Wilson & Morgan, 2016, p. 84). This is in addition to maintaining a vast knowledge base of current content, new technologies for teaching and assessment and working with families who also represent diverse backgrounds and needs (Shepherd et al., 2016).

Whether it is managing assessments, collaborating with colleagues to differentiate instruction or struggling with the high mental and emotional demand the job requires, it is easy to understand why these educators are experiencing amplified stress, and their well-being is in jeopardy which is intensifying the attrition rates of the profession. “Stress is one of the clearest predictors of teacher attrition” (Ryan, von der Embse, Pendergast, Saeki, Segool, & Schwing, 2017, p. 3).

Compassion Fatigue and Secondary Traumatic Stress

Compassion fatigue is typically a term used in the medical profession. However, it often is a precursor to burnout for teachers and other helping professionals (Skovholt & Trotter-Mathison, 2016). Compassion fatigue is defined by Charles Figley as cited in Skovholt and Trotter-Mathison (2016) as “the natural consequent behaviors and emotions resulting from knowing about a traumatizing event experienced by a significant other – the stress resulting from helping or wanting to help a traumatized or suffering person” (p. 110). This also includes the educator feeling helpless, and a deficiency of support in dealing with the situation and their compassion erodes over time as a result. Special education teachers are particularly vulnerable to compassion fatigue as they are dealing with a challenging population of students with a wide variety of needs related to trauma, mental illness, autism, learning disabilities, mood disorders, and more (Shepherd et al., 2016).

Santoro (2018) described that over fifty percent of public school children are living in poverty and due to recent developments in the country, such as the opioid epidemic and the latest presidential election, students are presenting with more anxiety than ever before. Districts are trying to provide trauma-sensitive training and creating learning environments conducive to the needs of students, but it does not appear that the districts are taking care of the teachers who are on the front lines working with these students (Santoro, 2018). Additionally, it is estimated 20% of youth ages 13-18 have a mental health condition, which is making the challenge of teaching even more difficult (Benson, 2017).

Working with students who have a trauma history is an exhausting task (Stamm, 1999). Those who work with traumatized students also run the risk of secondary traumatic stress or vicarious traumatization which is when the teacher, therapist or caregiver “experiences pain as a direct result of their exposure to other’s traumatic material. Unintentionally and inadvertently,

this secondary exposure to trauma may cause helpers to inflict additional pain on the originally traumatized” (Stamm, 1999, p. 4). When the trauma victim is a child, the pain of caring for them can be even more difficult (Stamm, 1999). This type of experience can have an “impact on the helper’s sense of self, worldview, spirituality, affect, tolerance, interpersonal relationships, and imagery system of memory” (Stamm, 1999, p. 32). This is an occupational hazard and not the fault of the student or the teacher (Stamm, 1999).

Disordered Eating

It can be tempting to fall victim to various unhealthy habits when not practicing self-care and renewal. Negative actions can take over our bodies and our state of well-being (Cook-Cottone, 2015). Aside from stress, and the risk of burnout, some people turn to dysregulation-based disorders such as disordered eating, self-injury, shopping addiction, pathological gambling, and substance abuse (Cook-Cottone, 2015).

Regarding nutrition, it is estimated that 40-50% of the population overeat when also stressed knowns as stress hyperphagic, but there are those who eat less because of stress or stress hypophagic (Sproesser, Schupp & Renner, 2014, p. 58). Both approaches are damaging. “Eating in response to stress is widely viewed as a type of maladaptive self-regulation that contributes to weight gain and the current obesity epidemic” (Sproesser et al., 2014, p. 58). While there is great variability when it comes to stress and how it impacts someone’s eating habits, in 2007, “a national survey in the United States found that approximately 4 in 10 Americans (43%) overeat or eat unhealthy foods to manage stress, whereas more than one third (36%) had skipped a meal in the last month because of stress” (Sproesser et al., 2014, p. 58). Either way, whether someone eats more or less as a result of stress, it is not ideal and impacts a person’s health and impedes their bodies natural functioning capabilities.

Teachers often express a concern over a limited time to eat lunch, use the restroom, eat a snack, or hydrate during the day. This lack of ability to properly feed oneself can have an impact on an educator's well-being and lead to various disordered eating habits such as skipping meals, bingeing, purging, and relying on caffeine to get through the day (Culbert, Racine & Klump, 2015; Tribole & Resch, 2012).

Working Conditions

Maintaining a qualified workforce and a workplace conducive to sustaining special education teachers is challenging (Billingsley, 2004; Wong et al., 2017). School districts try to compensate for the shortage of qualified teachers by eliminating services or by increasing class sizes, so it is difficult to pinpoint the exact impact attrition rates of special education teachers have on students. (Billingsley, 2004). Leaders should not just place adults in front of classrooms with students; they need to recruit and maintain effective teachers who have a strong positive impact on students (Murnane & Steele, 2007). Sadly, some districts respond to the shortage of effective teachers by filling the vacancies with ineffective ones (Murnane & Steele, 2007). This is not favorable for a healthy school environment (Billingsley, 2004).

Billingsley (2004) reported that many attrition studies have focused on working conditions that promote teacher retention and negative factors that contribute to attrition. It is clear that “low salaries, poor school climate, lack of administrative support, and role overload and dissonance—lead to negative affective reactions to work, including high levels of stress, low levels of job satisfaction, and low levels of commitment. These negative reactions may lead to withdrawal and eventually attrition” (Billingsley, 2004, p. 50). The working conditions and the school culture are key to the success of the school and can make a huge difference in the well-being of the group members (Allen, 1989; Billingsley, 2004). Allen (1989) used a flower

metaphor which depicted the relationship between culture and well-being in the workplace as the “people are the flowers and the culture is the soil” (p. 1). With unhealthy soil, the flowers will not flourish, but it is typical in Western society to overlook the culture when attempting lifestyle changes (Allen, 1989, 1). However, to have a healthy school, that promotes well-being for all, this must be addressed.

Working conditions are difficult to measure, such as “facilities quality, parent support, school leadership quality, collegiality with the school, and curricular autonomy” (Murnane & Steele, 2007). However, these are all factors contributing to teacher attrition. School leaders who are interested in reducing attrition rates should focus on overhauling their working environments for special education teachers; “a holistic look at creating positive work environments should not only reduce attrition behavior but also help sustain special education teachers’ involvement in and commitment to their work” (Billingsley, 2004, p. 54). Santoro (2018) further noted that additional working conditions should also be explored such as the school environment factors that impact student and adult learning including leadership, collaboration opportunities, accountability structures, class sizes, facilities, instructional resources and access to technology. Teachers are often asked to take on new tasks and responsibilities, with little to no regard for their well-being (Anderson, 2010). Generally, teachers, like other helping professionals, are passionate about what they do and enjoy working with students, often referring to their profession as a “calling” (Skovholt & Trotter-Mathison, 2016). They want to make a difference in the lives of students, so they are inclined to say yes to additional duties. Leaders are not always attuned to the needs of their teachers in ways that support self-care and renewal. There is often a lack of time for proper support and mentoring, which leads to poor working conditions and an increase in stress for educators (Anderson, 2010). “Teachers who are stressed or

experience burnout are more likely to leave school, leading to an unstable and potentially lower-quality teaching workforce” (Wong et al., 2017, p. 421).

Anderson (2010) stated that unhappy and stressed out teachers, produce unhappy and stressed out students. Teachers largely shape student’s moods and attitudes about school and the quality of instruction students receive is diminished when teachers are stressed (Ansley et al., 2016; Santoro, 2018; Wong et al., 2017). This is true for general education and special education teachers. With accountability looming and resources scarce, plus the fact that it is difficult to create and maintain a good school, schools are not always happy places (Hayes, 2006; Tschannen-Moran & Tschannen-Moran, 2014). If teachers are stressed, frustrated, and unhappy, the students can sense it, and the culture of the school can become toxic (Tschannen-Moran & Tschannen-Moran, 2014).

Lack of Autonomy and Resources

Santoro (2018) described that the teaching profession has become “vilified” meaning that compared to a dozen other professions, teachers are least likely to agree with the following statement: “at my work, my opinions seem to count” (p. 27). Teachers do not have much autonomy at work and are often not involved in the decisionmaking. However, they are required to meet or exceed the expectations dictated by the governing bodies (Paquette & Rieg, 2016; Santoro, 2018). This places a high demand on their time and energy and allows for scrutiny of their activities. Teachers need to feel vital to the process instead of being bombarded with new initiatives, and they need the freedom to make professional decisions (Santoro, 2018). They are not just mechanics in front of a classroom, but instrumentalists and professionals (Tell, 1999).

This deterioration over the past twenty years, coupled with the following:
“standardization, increased focus on core subjects/narrowing of the curriculum, prescribed

curriculum, adoption of corporate practices/use of value-added measures, high-stakes accountability for students and teachers, fast-track or alternative teacher licensure programs” is intensifying an already difficult job (Santoro, 2018, p. 27). Teachers are not given the resources or the time to accomplish what is being asked of them, and this is contributing to the increased stress and burnout, which further exemplifies the need for self-care and renewal.

Doing more with less has become commonplace in schools. Santoro (2018) referred to this as “intensification” of the profession which speaks to the increased demands added to a teacher’s already heavy workload without the compensation of time to incorporate the new expectations or a reduction of existing duties. “The new duties may include unprecedented expectations to collect and analyze data, recordkeeping to justify referrals to special education, explicit test preparation and practice, and adoption of new curriculum standards” (Santoro, 2018, p. 28). It should be noted that typically, teachers are expected to implement new curriculum and mandates without proper time or training (Santoro, 2018).

Santoro (2018) explained that in 2008, public schools experienced a dramatic setback to their staffing resulting in the loss of many staff positions, including teachers, counselors, aides, librarians, and nurses. In the time since, districts have scrambled to fill the void of these vacancies by having other teachers fill in with little to no preparation or training for these roles (Santoro, 2018). Many districts have not fully recovered and do not have the ideal staffing for their schools (Santoro, 2018).

Challenging Students

The number of students over the years requiring specialized services has grown at a rate that exceeds the capacity to produce qualified teachers. The demand for teachers is higher than those who desire to become special education teachers, and it is becoming increasingly difficult

to retain talented special education teachers (Weintraub, 2012). Weintraub (2012) further proposed that all beginning and returning special education teachers should be paired with job-alike mentors for the first two years and that leaders reduce the amount of non-instructional responsibilities and provide these teachers with the tools and conditions they need to be successful.

Furthermore, over the years, many strategies have been developed and resources created to aid the success of all students, including those that address the well-being of the students (Benson, 2017). However, the structures for supporting teachers working with increasingly challenging students has remained the same (Benson, 2017). Benson (2017) further identified that teachers today are dealing with a more complex, high-needs population of students than ever before, which is truly testing the mental health capacity of the teachers. Very little has been done to support these teachers in their efforts of working with these students and maintaining their well-being in the process (Benson, 2017).

Teacher Preparation

Several studies have shown that 40-50% of teachers leave teaching during the first five years on the job (Ingersoll, 2012). There is a growing body of research that theorizes that teacher preparation needs to improve the process for evaluating teacher's abilities and training them before entering the field.

It is important that positive preconditions are established prior to professional entry. We think the basic conditions for teachers are joy in associating with children and adolescents, social-communicative strengths, emotional stability, as well as a proactive approach towards life demands. It is therefore essential to directly convey effective coping skills for everyday occupational problems during teacher education; especially the

capability for effective self-management in stressful situations. (Kieschke & Schaarschmidt, 2008, p. 436)

Kieschke and Schaarschmidt (2008) referred to self-care practices for effective coping in the statement above. Teacher preparation programs should be realistic in their training of new teachers, and alternative licensure programs should also require a component of effective coping and stress management. “Teacher preparation programs and school districts are in a unique position to provide beginning teachers with needed support and mentoring during their early years” (Busch, Pederson, Espin & Weissenburger, 2001, p. 92). Coping mechanisms and a realistic view of the demands of the profession can help retain these educators. (Busch et al., 2001).

Teacher preparation programs are not necessarily designed to help educators meet the demands of today’s school children with their unique challenges (Richardson & Shupe, 2003; Santoro, 2018). Alternative teacher education programs have also produced educators who are not ready for the realities of teaching (Santoro, 2018). Unprepared educators are contributing to attrition issues (Santoro, 2018). Having an unrealistic perspective of the demands of a job make it near impossible to rise to the occasion and manage all that is being expected, especially without the proper support, preparation and training (Busch et al., 2001).

Novice Teacher Isolation

Having a positive initial teaching experience has been shown to reduce attrition rates. Feeling isolated and a lack of collegiality has impacted first-year teachers negatively and increased their stress levels leading to them leaving the field (Busch et al., 2001). “The novice enters practice as a new canoeist enters the water – with anxiety, some instruction, a crude map, and some previous life experience” (Skovholt & Trotter-Mathison, 2016, p. 41). Frequently, new

teachers are given very little guidance and support as they enter the field, and it becomes a “sink or swim” experience for them (Ingersoll, 2012). New teachers leaving the field report that they felt unsupported by the administration as their main reason for leaving (Ingersoll, 2012).

A lack of professional experience makes everything more difficult for the novice teacher, and it is easy to point a finger towards oneself when starting in the profession which only further exacerbates the stress and anxiety more (Skovholt & Trotter-Mathison, 2016). This is where a strong mentoring relationship can be crucial for the beginning teacher; preferably a veteran teacher should act as the mentor (Skovholt & Trotter-Mathison, 2016). It is common for a novice teacher not to have defined boundaries and get overwhelmed by the lives of their students before realizing that they have lost themselves in the process (Skovholt & Trotter-Mathison, 2016). While moderate levels of anxiety can improve performance, overwhelming stress and anxiety can be detrimental (Skovholt & Trotter-Mathison, 2016). In this instance, self-care and renewal can play an important role in the well-being of the teacher.

Approaches to Self-Care and Renewal

There are many approaches to self-care and renewal and developing an individual tailor-fit routine is important (Cook-Cottone, 2015). Self-care can be any activity such as taking a mental health day, proper nutrition, hydration, yoga, mindfulness, meditation, getting a massage, Reiki, taking a walk, and more. “Balancing work, play, and rest helps us to remain grounded in the various aspects of our complex identities” (Stamm, 1999, p. 54). Additionally, creative endeavors can also be helpful to incorporate into a self-care and renewal practice.

Writing, playing music, creating art, gardening, being physically active through exercise, dance, or hard physical work; reconnecting with one’s body through massage, dance, yoga. Each of these activities, in its own way balances some

aspect of the helper/listener/nurturer roles we play in our work. (Stamm, 1999, p. 54)

Any activity or method that allows one to slow down, breathe, and connect with oneself can be considered self-care and renewal. “In Buddhism, it is believed that we suffer not from what is happening, but due to our relationship with what is happening” (as cited in Cook-Cottone, 2015, p. 70). This is where self-care and renewal practices are critical in figuring out how one responds to the various stressors that educators face in life. “Between stimulus and response, there is a space. In that space, [one has] the power to choose a response. In [the] response, lies growth, freedom and possibility” (as cited in Cook-Cottone, 2015, p. 58). The space in between is where self-care takes center stage.

Self-care and renewal can provide an antidote to destructive behaviors such as those described in the previous section. Skovholt and Trotter-Mathison (2016) emphasized that “self-care is always important. At times of personal crisis or excessive stress, when the ability to function well may be severely compromised, it is even more important” (p. 129). Personal and professional lives can be full of many different ups and downs, and unforeseen circumstances can muddy the waters, but through self-care and renewal practices, one can find their way back to balance.

It should be distinguished that any self-care practice should feel good and not burdensome. If for example, exercise does not feel good and joyful or if one is experiencing pain, a different approach should be utilized. Powering through, or overdoing it, is not self-care and will not benefit oneself in the long term (Cook-Cottone, 2015; Lyubomirsky, 2010).

Proper Nutrition and Intuitive Eating

Everyone has a unique relationship with food, and those relationships can be complex for a variety of reasons including cultural backgrounds, upbringing, lifestyle habits, emotional coping patterns, genetics, and more (Kahn & Saulo, 1994). In the United States, in general, people tend to overeat, and many diseases and cancers are attributed to improper nutrition (Kahn & Saulo, 1994). The act of eating should be relaxing and mindful (Tribole & Resch, 2012). In a constantly moving, screen-addicted society, it is hard to make time free of distractions for activities like eating (Tribole & Resch, 2012).

As adults, many have learned to ignore our bodies hunger cues and skip a meal or grab a snack on the go. People often do not stop eating when they are full, and they do not eat when they are hungry (Tribole & Resch, 2012). Teachers report not having enough time to eat or even use the restroom, so properly fueling, feeding and hydrating their bodies during the day is a challenge and a problem for their well-being (Anderson, 2010).

Youngs (1993) specified that when the body is deprived of basic nutrients resulting in a deficiency, it is even less able to ward off the impacts of stress making one more susceptible and vulnerable to major health issues. Good health is contingent on proper nutrition and balance and feeding one's body appropriately is a self-care practice that needs to be integrated into daily routines (Cook-Cottone, 2017; Young, 1993).

Regular Exercise

Aerobic exercise, such as walking, running, swimming, dancing, or bicycling, are considered some of the most important forms of exercise (Ansley et al., 2016). Ansley et al. (2016) defined aerobic exercise as “any physical activity that increases heart rate, respiration, and perspiration” (p. 180). Aerobic exercise promotes the flow of oxygen (Kahn & Saulo, 1994). A fit body is more efficient than an unfit one. A moderate exercise regimen can consist of 30

minutes most days of the week (Kahn & Saulo, 1994). Seligman (2012) stressed the importance of at least 5,000 steps a day. Seligman (2012) further explained that although 10,000 steps per day is optimal for health benefits according to the American Heart Association, anything less than 5,000 puts an individual at unnecessarily high risk of health consequences. Even in sedentary older adults, there are benefits to exercising or starting a low-intensity exercise program (Lyubomirsky, 2010).

Lyubomirsky (2010) referenced a study later named the Standard Medical Intervention and Long-term Exercise (SMILE) study from 1999 where the results showed that aerobic exercise was as effective as Zoloft (a prescription antidepressant) at treating depression with no negative side effects or costs associated with it.

Mindfulness and Meditation Practice

In the Buddhist tradition, the mind is viewed as one of the sense organs, like the eyes and ears, and mindfulness calls for us to pay skillful attention to both our inner and outer worlds (Cook-Cottone, 2015). “Mindfulness teaches us to be present with our experience, bringing attention to the automatic responses we have and may not notice” (Skovholt & Trotter-Mathison, 2016, p. 58). Kabat-Zinn (2013), who founded the renowned Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction Clinic at the University of Massachusetts, defined the practice of mindfulness as paying attention, moment to moment, non-judgmentally. The non-judgment piece is key, regardless of what flows through the mind, let it pass without judgment. In other words, mindfulness is a state of awareness. Meditation is a practice that promotes mindfulness. The act of meditating is the act of non-doing. Kabat-Zinn (2013) noted that “it is the only human endeavor...that does not involve trying to get somewhere else but, rather, emphasizes being

where you are already” (p. 55). Meditation is training the mind to be less reactive and more stable, making each moment count (Kabat-Zinn, 2013).

There are two types of meditation. Insight meditation which brings full attention and awareness to the present moment without trying to change it, but rather observe it, and concentration meditation which focuses on something such as a mantra, a chant or picture (Cook-Cottone, 2015). Both methods have profound benefits.

It is recommended to have a dedicated time for meditation practice, and beginners should aim for sitting for two to five minutes (Cook-Cottone, 2015). “Formal meditation cultivates the space stimulus, and response...as [one] sits in meditation, [one] notices the stimuli...each stimulus is automatically and immediately tagged by the brain with a feeling tone” (Cook-Cottone, 2015). The feelings can be pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral; however, “due to biological mechanisms of self-protection negative trumps positive” (Cook-Cottone, 2015, p. 118). One cannot control the fact that negative trumps positive, however, a choice can be made to attach, avoid, or allow by digging into the space between the stimulus and the feeling (Cook-Cottone, 2015). Mindfulness and meditation train the practitioners not to get attached to the negative (Cook-Cottone, 2015; Kabat-Zinn, 2013). Lyubomirsky (2010) identified crucial elements to aim for or “to be” in meditation practice as nonjudgmental as one observes each moment, be non-striving, be patient, be trusting, be open, and to let go.

Researchers who study the bodies of people during the practice of meditation have confirmed that meditators are able to attain both a profound state of physiological rest (indicated by a reduced respiration rate for instance) and a heightened state of awareness and alertness (indicated by such things as increased blood flow and other relevant markers in the brain). (Lyubomirsky, 2010, p. 241)

It is not surprising to recognize that meditation has an impact on one's health. "Meditation interventions have been shown to be effective in patients with heart disease, chronic pain, skin disorders, and a variety of mental health conditions such as depression, anxiety, panic, and substance abuse" (Lyubomirsky, 2010, p. 242).

Kabat-Zinn (2013) recommended that one practice meditation and yoga in the morning as it has a lasting positive impact on the day, but no rule dictates when one should or should not practice either. He described,

When I start off the day dwelling in stillness, resting in awareness, inhabiting and thereby nourishing the domain of being, and cultivating some degree of calmness and concentration, I seem to be more mindful and relaxed the rest of the day as well, and better able to recognize stress and handle it more effectively. (Kabat-Zinn, 2012, p. 36)

The important mindsets to cultivate during mindfulness are "non-harming, generosity, gratitude, forbearance, forgiveness, kindness, compassion, empathetic joy, and equanimity" (Kabat-Zinn, 2013, p. 31).

Yoga and the Importance of Breath

Yoga in Sanskrit means "to unite" as in the mind, body, and spirit (Pandurangi et al., 2017). *The Bhagavad Gita*, one of the traditional yoga texts, described the practice as "the yogi turns his mind inward, detaching from the material world to realize the true nature of the self." (as cited in Pandurangi et al., 2017) The true nature of the self includes the importance of caring for the self (Pandurangi et al., 2017). In practice, Ansley et al. (2016) defined yoga as "a system of exercises that focus on specific body stretches and poses; also focuses on breathing and mental control; each type varies in style" (p. 180). Yoga is widely used and is regarded as a

staple in a self-care routine. It is estimated today that 36 million Americans practice yoga in some form (Pandurangi et al., 2017).

Developed in India in 800-400 B.C., the ancient practice of yoga has been passed down by generations and is highly beneficial, and a great self-care tool which strives to bring together the mind, body, and spirit as one (Kahn & Saulo, 1994). The results of regular yoga practice over time include, “flexibility, a toned and firm body, vitality, emotional and mental clarity, and peacefulness” (Kahn & Saulo, 1994, p. 112). To reap the benefits of yoga practice, Cook-Cottone (2015) recommended that one practices yoga for one hour, three times a week for six weeks. Yoga has been increasing in popularity and is viewed as an easily accessible tool for health and wellness.

Breathing is a major part of a yoga practice and should be part of any self-care routine. However, one can benefit from breathing exercises without taking a yoga class. Breathing exercises can be practiced anywhere at any time. “The breath has a very important partner in its work, namely the heart...this amazing muscle never stops pumping during our entire lifetime” (Kabat-Zinn, 2013, p. 40). There is an ancient proverb, which advises “He who half breathes, half lives” (Cook-Cottone, 2015). In Sanskrit, “pranayama” is defined as “the practice of breathing work to calm down and energize the body” derived from the word for breathing or “vitality of life,” prana and “ayama” which refers to expansion or the stretching out (Cook-Cottone, 2015). “Controlling and regulating [ones] breathing is another effective way to relax...and reduce [ones] stress level” (Youngs, 1993, p. 78). Many people take short, shallow breaths from the chest and not deep diaphragmatic breaths from the belly (Youngs, 1993; Cook-Cottone, 2015; Kabat-Zinn, 2012). Cook-Cottone (2015) outlined the qualities of good breathing

as deep diaphragm drive, smooth flow without pause, consistency with inhalations, and exhalations equal in length, without sound and continuity.

In addition to deep diaphragmatic breaths, a technique that is believed to help calm both the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous system by balancing the right and left energies of the body is called Alternate-Nostril Breathing or “Nadi Shodana” (Cook-Cottone, 2015). In Sanskrit “Nadi” means river and “Shodana” means energy channel” (Cook-Cottone, 2015, p. 222). When practicing any breathing exercise, it is important to bring awareness back to the breathing, as thoughts flow through the mind, and always try to keep the awareness on the breath (Cook-Cottone, 2015).

Finding Balance Through Reiki

Another self-care practice is Reiki. Reiki is a Japanese term meaning “universal life force” believed to have originated thousands of years ago in Tibet (vanderVaart, Gijzen, de Wildt & Koren, 2009, p. 1157) This “ancient, hands-on healing practice is believed to rebalance the biofield, thus strengthening the body’s ability to heal and increasing systemic resistance to stress” (Cuneo et al., 2011, p. 34). Energy healing has appeared throughout history, including in the work of Hippocrates and the Indian Chakra system (vanderVaart et al., 2009). Reiki aims to heal the whole body, not just a single ailment or pain (vanderVaart et al., 2009). Everything is made of energy, and when energy is blocked or disrupted, disease or illness can manifest itself (Cuneo et al., 2011). Reiki allows for the energy to be restored and balanced. Reiki is becoming more prevalent as a stress-reduction technique for nurses.

Reflection and Improving Practice

Reflection is an important renewal technique that requires one to take pause, remain open, ask questions, think, learn, and take action to evolution (York-Barr et al., 2006). Stepping

back from what has recently happened and pondering the meaning of the experience to probe deeper to gain insight is a great tool to promote one's well-being (York-Barr et al., 2006).

Continuous learning and reflective practice for educators ensure they do not become stagnant in their roles and allows them to consider multiple perspectives of a situation (Pedro, 2006; York-Barr et al., 2006). Furthermore, reflection acts as a formative assessment for the educator and permits them to articulate a better understanding of their roles (York-Barr et al., 2006).

Reflection can be practiced in many ways ranging from journaling, case review, reading literature, developing a teaching portfolio, freeing one's mind through movement, taking a retreat, observing and listening to one's practice perhaps through the use of recording devices for future playback and discovery (Drago-Severson & Blum-DeStefano, 2015; York-Barr et al., 2006). Reflection can also be practiced with a partner or in small groups and teams which enhances support, builds trust and relationships amongst colleagues and promotes self-care and renewal (Pedro, 2006; York-Barr et al., 2006). Through one's experiences, there is an opportunity to learn, improve, renew, and grow to utilize reflection (York-Barr et al., 2006).

Obstacles to Self-Care and Renewal Practices in Schools

Just as there are factors that promote self-care and renewal, there are those that inhibit the efforts for educators such as a lack of self-awareness and knowledge about different approaches to self-care, as well as time and competing priorities. Additionally, some people are opposed to self-care and renewal practices as they do not know the benefits or for leaders, they do not feel it is their place or responsibility to promote such practices. Teachers have a responsibility to themselves and their students to take care of themselves (Skovholt & Trotter-Mathison, 2016).

Lack of Self-Awareness

Gold and Roth (1993) identified self-awareness as a key component for teachers to manage stress and they defined the term as “a process of getting in touch with [ones] feelings and behaviors” (as cited in Richardson & Shupe, 2003, p. 8). Therefore, a lack of self-awareness can be detrimental to a teacher. All teachers but especially those who work with students who have emotional and behavioral challenges can “enhance their effectiveness and job satisfaction, minimize power struggles and build more positive relationships with children with disabilities by taking proactive steps to increase their own self-awareness” (Richardson & Shupe, 2003, p. 8). Teachers need to take stock of their behaviors, and having increased self-awareness involves a better understanding of how each other’s emotional processes impact the other (Richardson & Shupe, 2003). “Awareness of our primary emotional triggers improves our chances of making rational decisions based on conscious choice, rather than unconscious emotional conditioning” (Richardson & Shupe, 2003, p. 9).

Richardson and Shupe (2003) wrote that a teacher could reflect upon themselves to increase their self-awareness and promote self-care and renewal for themselves. Through reflection the educator can evaluate the steps they are taking proactively to diffuse any emotional triggers, assess where their attention is being directed, identify the effective strategies they are using to reduce burnout and nurture their mental health, appropriately building relationships and regularly acknowledging the difference they are making in the lives of students.

Teachers must remember that their attitude and stress level impact the students, the classroom environment, and of course, themselves. It is easy to become overwhelmed by the magnitude of teaching. Teachers are typically isolated from colleagues and get so wrapped up in attending to students that they disregard themselves (Richardson & Shupe, 2003; Skovholt & Trotter-Mathison, 2016).

Lack of Knowledge about Self-Care and Renewal

Teachers may not be aware of all the self-care and renewal practices and benefits available to them for little to no cost and with no special equipment. Various hindrances can impede a teacher's ability to access self-care, and teachers typically do not put themselves first (Skovholt & Trotter-Mathison, 2016). They have to understand that they must take care of themselves to care for others (Skovholt & Trotter-Mathison, 2016). Cook-Cottone (2016) developed a self-care scale that can be used by teachers to evaluate their areas of deficiencies with regards to self-care. This tool could be used as a starting point to explore someone's current self-care practices and knowledge and identify a plan for developing a deeper practice.

Time and Competing Priorities

Anderson (2010) noted that teachers do not have enough time as there is a lot to accomplish during the day and to attempt to do everything, they ignore their own needs (Anderson, 2010; Skovholt & Trotter-Mathison, 2016). Teachers too often concentrate on the immediate tasks at hand and the intense human needs before them, rather than thinking of how they must take care of themselves to be able to thrive for the decades of their work (Skovholt & Trotter-Mathison, 2016). "Our bodies are the vessels; some even say temples, of our existence. In health and well-being, we exist as our bodies, constantly nourishing, nurturing, challenging, and attuning (Cook-Cottone, 2015, p. 201). Neglecting oneself in one's work is not helpful or sustaining. Whether it is meeting with parents, students, administering assessments, grading papers, designing lesson plans, or attending a faculty meeting, the tasks seem endless and insurmountable (Allen, 2013; Anderson, 2010). Allen (2013) provided insight for teachers in being able to reclaim their time by accepting the responsibility as to how they manage their time, themselves, thoughts, and feelings. By honoring the ebb and flow of time as it occurs and

managing the reactions to the experiences, rather than impose an artificial order, one can become better equipped and more productive in the long term (Allen, 2013). Time can become “supercharged” for educators with the constant pressure of getting things done (Allen, 2013). From a self-care perspective, the emotions that accompany time are most important to address, and teachers can learn to improve efficiency by examining their current use of time and the emotions associated with time (Allen, 2013).

Teachers can prioritize their tasks by considering those that are non-negotiable and figuring out what can become secondary or eliminated if necessary. Anderson (2010) stressed the importance of viewing the tasks from the perspective of which responsibilities will help one meet their need for belonging, significance, positive engagement and competence and focus one’s energy on those first. Teachers who honor their time need to learn to say no certain tasks as taking on too much will not yield desirable results, therefore saying no to additional responsibilities is possibly more respectful and helpful in the long term (Anderson, 2013; Rankin, 2017). Furthermore, teachers can adapt their productivity habits to promote efficiency by minimizing interruptions, capitalizing on their most productive time of the day, embracing flexibility, leveraging resources, recruiting volunteers or classroom helpers, advocating for their needs, and balancing assignments and grading duties (Anderson, 2013; Rankin, 2017). Teachers can also learn to devote time to tasks in a way that is conducive to balance by only checking email selectively, turning off the work phone, and restricting laptop usage. All of these actions allow the teacher to “unplug,” which is a necessary ingredient for practicing self-care and renewal (Anderson, 2010).

Controversies About Self-Care

No matter how widespread the benefits are or how much research has been conducted, there are always opposing viewpoints. Some argue that self-care has become a money-making industry which is taking the essence out of the practice (Kabat-Zinn, 2015; Kisner, 2017). Others claimed that self-care is too generalized and that everyone's needs are different, therefore the blanket of self-care cannot fix everything or worse, is going to cause more harm as it ignores serious underlying conditions (Loch, 2017). There are also those who feel that practices such as yoga and mindfulness are religious in nature and therefore have no place in schools for students or teachers.

Religious undertones.

Despite its popularity and use in many schools for students, practices such as yoga and mindfulness have roots in Hinduism and Buddhism and therefore some argue that such practices do not belong in schools as they are fundamentally religious activities (Brown, 2019). Even when these practices are solely used as a warm-up activity to reduce stress, they spark debate (Brown, 2019). The American Center for Law and Justice as well as some religious conservatives have begun challenging public school programs that utilize mindfulness and yoga claiming that they do not have a place in public education settings (Brown, 2019). The lines are further blurred when others argue that these types of practices are spiritual and not religious. However, the opponents to the presence of such practices in schools claim that “school yoga and mindfulness pressure kids to commit idolatry — which many consider the worst of all religious transgressions and that the poses have religious significance as they are considered an acknowledgment and/or worship of Hindu deities” (Brown, 2019, p. 2). Despite this controversy regarding the underpinnings of these practices, their popularity continues to grow.

Generational differences.

Even though self-care is not new, there are those who believe that it is a fad or that it is selfish and self-indulgent while others claim that self-care is an aspect of white privilege aimed at wealthy women and not accessible for all (Harris, 2017; Kisner, 2017). Generational differences have exacerbated the vantage points and have gone as far as to claim that millennials as obsessed with self-care and perceive those who practice self-care as “entitled snowflakes” (Silva, 2017). Since self-care has risen in popularity recently and is a trending term on social media, naysayers neglect to recognize that this concept has been around since the earliest of civilizations (Kisner, 2017; Silva, 2017). However, recent research from the Pew Research Center noted that millennials are making commitments to their self-care and renewal as opposed to previous generations, “they spend twice as much as boomers on self-care essentials such as workout regimens, diet plans, life coaching, therapy and apps to improve their personal well-being” (Silva, 2017).

Those who have not practiced any of the techniques and experienced the benefits associated with various self-care techniques are skeptical of methods such as meditation, mindfulness, yoga, and Reiki as they do not believe the benefits.

Self-care tainted by consumerism.

Something like mindfulness is often misunderstood but is best described as a “way of being” (Kabat-Zinn, 2015). Over the past few decades, mindfulness has seeped into the mainstream in ways that seem superficial. This phenomenon has become known as “McMindfulness” (Kabat-Zinn, 2015). Kabat-Zinn (2015) noted,

McMindfulness ignores the ethical foundations of the meditative practices and traditions from which mindfulness has emerged and divorces it from its profoundly transformative potential...these voices argue that for certain opportunistic elements, mindfulness has

become a business that can only disappoint the vulnerable consumers who look to it as a panacea. (p. 2)

Consumer markets have taken advantage of McMindfulness to sell coloring books, smartphone applications, bath-bombs, clothing, and more, which makes mindfulness more of a commodity and takes it away from its roots (Pellissier, 2016). Hess (2017) further warned against certain self-care practices such as meditation and mindfulness treatments as they could mask underlying mental health issues that go untreated. He further stressed that too many people are drawn to these practices when doctors and psychologists do not fully understand them yet (Hess, 2017).

Other self-care practices such as yoga have been criticized and tainted by consumerism as well. Greenberg (2012) explained,

Gyms and health clubs without a holistic focus are also meeting demands from consumers by offering Yoga classes. Because there are many different styles of Yoga, and participants may not be aware of the differences in style, they are likely to choose the most affordable. This may lead novices into vigorous classes, such as Ashtanga or Bikram (heated) Yoga, with increased injury potential unless one knows what they are doing. (p. 3)

Regardless of age, social status, or resources available, the benefits of self-care are irrefutable and widely documented.

The Role of the School Leader in Promoting Self-Care and Renewal

Drago-Severson and Blum-DeStefano (2015) captured the essence of the role of a school leader and the importance of self-care and renewal in the following statement, “being a school leader in any role is hard, gratifying, and a gift of love. While it can be enormously satisfying to serve students, teachers, families, and school communities, the leader needs to refill themselves

to continue giving” (p. 38). Administrators and school leaders create the work environment for the school (Skovholt & Trotter-Mathison, 2016). A good leader can make or break the environment, as well as make the job positive and fulfilling and a bad leader can have the opposite effect on the culture (Skovholt & Trotter-Mathison, 2016). However, with an increase in demands and decrease in resources, leaders often encourage teachers to take on more duties and go the extra mile with no regard to their well-being. Leaders “often expect teachers to assume not only academic roles, but also those of instructional model, disciplinarian, surrogate parent, social worker, and counselor” (Richardson & Shupe, 2003, p. 10).

Considering this, teachers may look to their school leaders to help them in times of turmoil and provide a working environment that cultivates a teacher’s well-being. Regardless of a policy outcome, by a leader taking the time to engage with a teacher who is experiencing and expressing demoralization or at risk for burnout can be helpful (Santoro, 2018). If teachers’ concerns are heard, school leaders can help in the re-moralization process (Santoro, 2018).

Santoro (2018) noted in her research that teachers were not given exit interviews, nor were they asked by leaders what could be done to address their concerns. This is a missed opportunity for leaders to understand the needs of teachers better to help promote retention and their well-being. There is an abundance of activities a leader can do to help promote retention and improve teacher satisfaction including learning to listen, recognizing and responding to moral concerns, facilitating discussions about what good teaching looks like, curiosity about teacher resistance, identifying new initiatives and mandates as non-negotiable, desirable and better off ignored, practicing teacher-led principles, creating hybrid roles for teachers, conducting exit interviews, differentiating professional development, sharing responsibilities with teachers in tough decisions and establishing an ombudsperson for the district (Santoro,

2018). Additionally, the school leaders need to arrive daily with a positive attitude and presence leading by example with the confidence and willingness to share stories of struggle and triumph with their teachers (Allen, 2013; Tschannen-Moran & Tschannen-Moran, 2014). The leader's energy impacts everyone around them (Tschannen-Moran & Tschannen-Moran, 2014). It is easy to see how simple, mostly free self-care and renewal activities a leader can employ can make a big difference in their well-being and that of their teachers.

Unfortunately, it is possible to have leaders who do not promote self-care and renewal for themselves or their teachers in a school setting. Placing additional demands on their teachers already limited time, hiring unqualified staff to fill roles, not allowing for autonomy or collaboration are some of the ways that leaders act as an obstacle to self-care and renewal further contributing to the attrition and burnout rates (Richardson & Shupe, 2003; Santoro, 2018). Educators need proper resources, staffing, and support in schools to be successful (Billingsley, 2004).

Leaders, teachers, students, and families need to work together on a shared vision of the school and create a climate that is supportive and allows people to feel socially, emotionally, and physically safe in their schools (Cohen et al., 2009). Furthermore, school leaders should have a compelling and clearly communicated mission, administrative accessibility and support for all staff, and school leaders should honor the people at the school, and foster relationships (Cohen et al., 2009). When this is not in place, teachers can feel isolated, unsupported, overwhelmed, and undervalued, which can assist in their decision to leave the profession or run the risk of burnout. School leaders should also offer professional development to staff that is relevant and useful to foster growth and specific to the teacher's needs (Cohen et al., 2009). Teachers need to be properly prepared for their roles, and the same is true for school leaders.

Managing Time and Energy

The struggle to balance all the duties of a school leader is not new, and often the best-laid plans get derailed in action due to the numerous competing obligations and responsibilities that can arise at any given time in a school environment (Hochbein, 2019). To combat this challenge, leaders can view some of the items on their “to-do” as opportunities as opposed to tasks (Hochbein, 2019). Hochbein (2019) suggested that leaders should prioritize their demands, close their office doors to attend to tasks uninterrupted, manage the school operations that impact instruction, create checklists, and conduct a time study of daily activities to see where time is being allocated. All these suggestions can help a leader manage their time more effectively.

A 2010 study identified the dominant areas that school leaders spend their time. The areas include overseeing student services, managing budgets, and addressing discipline issues with students (Hornig, Klasik & Loeb, 2010). Furthermore, the study found that on average, principals spent almost 30% of their day addressing administrative responsibilities like compliance issues, managing schedules and supervising students, 20% of their day conducting management activities like hiring staff and maintaining the budget, and only a little over 10% spent on instruction-related tasks including observations and implementing professional development (Hornig et al., 2010). This does not leave a lot of time for everything else that school leaders tackle.

Leaders are managing a multitude of tasks, but little attention is focused on their self-care and renewal. Working extra hours, not getting adequate sleep, skipping meals, not hydrating, and a lack of exercise can all be taxing for the leader in their roles. A leader should learn to manage their time well, but also their energy (Schwartz & McCarthy, 2007). Demands in the workplace take a toll on their emotional, physical, and mental well-being, which can have a dramatic impact

on the work environment. Taking a moment to practice a breathing exercise or other self-care and renewal activity can have a large impact on a leader's overall ability to function at peak performance (Schwartz & McCarthy, 2007).

Some corporate work environments have begun offering "renewal rooms" for employees to ensure they have a place to relax and refuel during the day (Schwartz & McCarthy, 2007). Additionally, companies have a focus on wellness offerings for their employees, such as exercise opportunities, no-meeting times zones, in-office yoga classes, self-care fairs, and massages for staff. There is very little evidence of practices such as these being used in a school setting for the leaders and their teachers, but it is reasonable to conclude that if these offerings are successful in the business world, they would likely be successful in schools as well (Schwartz & McCarthy, 2007).

Mindful Leadership

Most leadership theories focus on what the leader should be doing as opposed to how they should be (Wells, 2015). Mindful leadership focuses on the leader's efforts by suggesting a way of being, not just doing (Ehrlich, 2017; Wells, 2015). Wells (2015) described the dimensions of mindfulness as being fully present, aware, accepting, and nonjudgmental to embody this way of being. As opposed to an emphasis on an act of doing, mindfulness allows for a sense of spaciousness that enacts patience, listening, and compassion. These are important qualities for leaders. "Mindful administrators seize the moment of opportunity, but inattentive ones, having missed the subtleties of change, find themselves unpleasantly surprised and trapped by the unexpected" (Hoy, Gage & Tarter, 2006, p. 236). Mindful leadership requires flexibility and openness to change and consider various points of view. This leadership approach builds trust between teachers and leaders, which is crucial to school success (Hoy et al., 2006).

Classic leadership theory defines leaders by traits; mindful leadership offers a description of presence, a subtlety of describing how leaders enact these traits by ways of being (Wells, 2015). Being present in the moment as a leader is very important. Leaders, like teachers, are experiencing high levels of stress in the workplace, but how leaders respond to the stress is crucial to their success, and these are skills that can be refined over time (Wells, 2015). Leaders need to find ways for their emotional well-being to thrive in their roles and be able to impart that upon their teachers (Wells, 2015). Educational leaders have a multitude of competing and compelling demands, but mindful leadership can offer hope in that it is “a source of renewal for the stress in their lives” (Wells, 2015, p.14). A mindfulness practice informs the leadership practice and it sets up the “conditions for effective leadership practice of creating vision, influencing others, building relationships, communicating, building capacity among the people in the organization, reculturing the workplace by modeling behavior, and building a harmonious and productive culture, all important functions of leadership” (Wells, 2015, p. 15).

Ehrlich (2017) compared mindful leadership to focusing a spotlight meaning that with all that occurs in the daily operations for a leader, it is easy to be unfocused, but through mindful leadership, a leader can focus their spotlight where they need it such as on themselves for reflection or on their teacher’s well-being.

The research on mindful leadership is divided into six broad categories which have been shown to improve a leader’s effectiveness. The six categories are spirit, emotion, mind, body, connection, and inspiration. More specifically these categories referred to the leader’s ability to have a clear sense of direction, control over their emotions but the willingness to be in touch with them, getting clear and paying attention in order to make better decisions, attend to their physical needs, practice self-care, listening better, building trusting relationships, and having a vision with

the passion for motivating and inspiring others (Ehrlich, 2017). Addressing all these aspects collectively can support a leader with practicing mindful leadership and being more effective in their roles supporting their needs and the needs of their teachers.

Creating a School Culture

The school leader is the primary facilitator of the culture of the school, and culture is incredibly important for the well-being of teachers and students (Drago-Severson & Blum-DeStefano, 2015). “Researchers who have studied culture have tracked and demonstrated a strong significant correlation between organizational culture and organization’s performance” (Shafer, 2018). There are several components of a healthy school culture that can be cultivated, including fostering relationships, trust, and interactions amongst colleagues (Bryk & Schneider, 2003; Shafer, 2018). In a strong culture, the leaders would have a clearly articulated vision communicated directly with teachers, administrators, counselors, and families who also communicate directly with one another (Shafer, 2018). A weaker culture occurs when teachers are operating in isolation and not working together for the collective ideal (Shafer, 2018).

Shafer (2018) further outlined that school culture is often shaped by a few interlaced elements such as fundamental beliefs and assumptions, shared values, norms, patterns and behaviors, and tangible evidence. To build a healthy school culture, a leader must address several aspects of the school, including acting as a role model (Shafer 2018). “Everything a leader does – her statement and philosophy, reactions to key events, energy and interaction style – influence culture in a powerful way” (Shafer, 2018, p. 2). Leaders can also select their staff wisely by ensuring that the incoming staff member has a belief system that aligns well with the expectations of the culture and the leader (Shafer 2019).

The leader must teach what they want to see by creating formal training and space for honest conversations about the attitudes, norms, and practices to be a member of the school community (Shafer, 2018). Incorporating social and emotional driven professional development into these discussions can help build camaraderie and increase engagement (Davenport, 2018). Through this type of activity, communication, and openness, a leader can begin shaping the desired outcome and culture (Davenport, 2018). Furthermore, a leader must broadcast their vision through all communication channels and platforms by highlighting the future and potential, using data to reduce ambiguity, appealing to people's emotions and motivations, staying positive, grateful and idealistic and using inclusive language to foster a sense of belonging to the community (Shafer, 2018). A strong school culture is one that concerns itself with the self-care and renewal of leaders and teachers (Drago-Severson & Blum-DeStefano, 2015). The ingredients that make a positive school culture also foster, support, and promote the ideas of self-care and renewal.

Visualizations such as mottos, slogans, traditions, and the physical design of the facilities can all help make an idea more tangible and help a leader promote or reinforce a message (Shafer, 2018). To strengthen a culture, a leader must also address those faculty who are isolated from the community and restructure the social construct to encourage interaction (Shafer, 2018). Additionally, public acknowledgments, praise, celebrations, displays around the school on bulletin boards are other key factors in creating a strong, healthy school culture (Davenport, 2018; DuFour, 1998).

Age in Relation to Self-Care

Theorists Erikson and Erikson (1997) identified various stages of development that

Humans experience as they age. School leaders are likely in adulthood or the generativity vs. stagnation stage of development (Erikson & Erikson, 1997). Generally, this stage encapsulates the development of those who are 40-65 years old. Care is the central notion or quality of this age range which means to be careful, to take care of and to care for or the virtue of care (Erikson & Erikson, 1997; MacLeod, 2018).

Generativity is concerned with “making your mark” or fostering things that will outlast the individual and live on beyond them, generativity gives the individual a sense of being a part of something bigger than themselves (McLeod, 2018). Failing to do this adequately can leave the individual feeling stagnant and disconnected from society and their community (McLeod, 2018).

A 2015 study conducted on Erikson’s notion of wisdom sought to examine how older adults view their mental and physical health. This study discovered that older adults reflected upon their younger years as a source of information to impact their current well-being at this stage. Additionally, the participants maintained control of their care. By reviewing their earlier stages of development, they created a comprehensive system of insight where they could engage in productive activities aimed at improving their current health (Perry, Ruggiano, Shtompel & Hassevoort, 2015). Self-care and renewal practices fit into this category as a priority of this stage of adult development.

Factors and Conditions that Promote Self-Care and Renewal in Schools

The more equipped a teacher or leader is in self-care, the more skilled they will be at recognizing the dangers associated with a lack of self-care for themselves and others. A sensitive leader will be more adept and mindful of the needs of their teachers and provide opportunities for self-care and renewal. In addition to supportive, mindful leadership, teachers can experience valuable relationships with colleagues, revitalization, re-moralization, and resiliency within their

professions which are known factors to combat the stressors of being an educator, thus promoting self-care and renewal.

Revitalization and Re-moralization

One way to counteract burnout is to focus on the antithesis, which is revitalization. (Newbrough, 1983). Newbrough (1983) suggested structured time, physical exercise, making time for special relationships, maintaining enthusiasm, celebrating, professional support engagement as some of the key ways teachers can ward avoid burnout. These suggestions align with a self-care and renewal practice. Santoro (2018) called this re-moralization and referred to when a teacher can reimagine their role in a way that allows them to feel positive. Santoro (2018) further explained that teacher re-moralization typically fits into the following five broad and sometimes overlapping categories depending on their role; “student-centered action, teacher leadership, activism, voice, and professional community” (p. 116).

Santoro (2018) explained that the student-centered action is between the teacher and the student and may involve creativity to work around barriers, such as applying for a grant to provide services necessary that a district is failing to provide or giving a student a passion grade to preserve a sense of justice. When teachers exercise activism, they are taking a public position or stance against policy or practice and can feel re-moralized, having let their voice be heard (Santoro, 2018). “Many teachers attribute their demoralization to an inability to have their voice be heard” (Santoro, 2018, p. 118), so finding an outlet for a teacher’s voice can have re-moralizing qualities. Utilizing an educator’s professional community is an overarching re-moralizing strategy which can simply be identifying with allies and other like-minded colleagues. “Trusted colleagues can help us examine our distortions” (Stamm, 1999, p. 60). Re-moralization is the most challenging when one is acting alone and feeling unsupported (Santoro, 2018).

A Sense of Resiliency

Resiliency is often touted as the cure for burnout and the solution to retention issues (Skovholt & Trotter-Mathison, 2016; Santoro, 2018). Resiliency “refers to a person’s ability to adapt positively to difficult and trying situations...or the capacity to bounce back from a negative force – like a fishing bobber, pushed underwater, pops back up” (Skovholt & Trotter-Mathison, 2016, p. 3). The word is derived from the Latin word “resilire,” which means “to leap back” (Skovholt & Trotter-Mathison, 2016, p. 125). A sense of resiliency or grit is not a negative quality for helping professionals like educators to have, but it does not make them immune to the threats of burnout or demoralization (Santoro, 2018; Cook-Cottone, 2015). “Teachers need to have a personal reserve and interpersonal resources that enable them to withstand the challenges inherent to teaching” (Santoro, 2018, p. 109).

It is tempting to point to the retention rates and draw a parallel to a lack of resiliency as a reason behind the dreary numbers (Santoro, 2018). “Attrition may be the result of the ‘leavers’ refusal to engage in practices and follow policies that they perceive as damaging to students, their communities, and the teaching profession, rather than a poor ability to rebound from challenges” (Santoro, 2018, p. 108). Santoro (2018) noted that resilience commonly called for teachers to find various self-care practices such as mindfulness, balance, collegial support, and more with an understanding that one can accept the conditions as they are. “Resilience fails to address the institutional, systemic, and policy-based origins or a moral problem” (Santoro, 2018). Most of the issues plaguing teachers cannot be cured with a dose of resilience, and researchers, leaders, and teacher educators “need to investigate the sources of teacher dissatisfaction and attrition” (Santoro, 2018, p. 110).

Support from Colleagues

Teachers need a safe space to vent and supportive colleagues to vent to (Richardson & Shupe, 2003). In a survey of special education teachers, 96.6% rated talking and collaborating with special education colleagues as the most effective strategy for managing stress and coping with the demands of the profession (Richardson & Shupe, 2003). “We need to recognize the difference, however, between the need to vent and a pattern of negativity and complaining” (Richardson & Shupe, 2003, p. 11). A habitual pattern of complaining can be a warning sign of burnout. “We must regularly assess our coping skills and seek out positive colleagues and role models who will engage in supportive, constructive dialogue (Richardson & Shupe, 2003, p. 11).

Professional Development

Providing teachers with space and the tools to manage their practice and grow as practitioners are crucial to their success (Skovholt & Trotter-Mathison, 2016). Professional development is a lifelong process allowing teachers to master various skills and “improve their competence, handle difficulties and challenges more adequately, and become more skillful in regulating responsibilities” (Skovholt & Trotter-Mathison, 2016, p. 201). With regards to self-care and renewal, teachers need practical strategies at their disposal to manage their stress, emotions, assess the situation, and monitor their reaction (Jennings, 2018). Offering training on mindfulness could be a starting point, but it should be thoughtful, consistent, and relevant.

This simple ability to respond, rather than react, is at the heart of mindfulness training, a rapidly growing, evidence-based approach to reducing educators’ stress. Mindfulness can’t solve the systemic and societal challenges today’s schools face—but it can give educators the presence of mind they need to manage their emotions and address classroom problems more constructively. (Jennings, 2018, p. 64)

Training in social-emotional learning (SEL) for educators would be another potential professional development offering that could be beneficial for teachers in managing their stress. There has been a focus on SEL for students over the past few years, but little attention has been given to providing SEL for leaders and teachers. Research has shown that SEL for students has been very successful (Jennings, 2018, p. 65). There are countless possibilities for providing “opportunities for educators to demonstrate problem-solving, compassion, and empathy in the classroom. And think of the impact of embedding self-care and resilience in our teachers’ professional development programs” (Jennings, 2018, p. 65). This type of training could be the norm for teacher professional development to address the issues around stress, burnout, retention, morale, and job satisfaction.

Summary

Self-care and renewal approaches are ancient practices that have been proven to be effective in mitigating stress. In schools, self-care and renewal practices can help to combat absenteeism, burnout, attrition, demoralization, and contribute to building the capacity of teachers to improve student learning. Teachers and leaders need to make self-care and renewal a priority. A variety of approaches to self-care and renewal have been explored in this review of the literature. There are a few obstacles to implementing self-care practices in schools, including a lack of self-awareness, lack of knowledge of self-care and renewal, time demands, and competing priorities. Key to creating a culture of self-care and renewal is the school leader. Teachers and leaders can work together to identify factors and conditions that both inhibit and promote self-care and renewal practices. Through self-care and renewal, teachers and leaders can increase their effectiveness in improving teaching and learning. Teachers inspire and change the lives of their students through their work, but they must attend to their needs in the process.

Chapter Three details the method of this study including the rationale for the design, setting and participants, development of the instruments, data collection and analysis procedures, the role of the researcher, philosophical worldview, issues with trustworthiness, and delimitations and limitations of the study.

CHAPTER THREE: METHOD

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions and lived experiences of private special education school leaders regarding their role in promoting self-care and renewal practices for themselves and their teachers. My personal experience and interest in self-care and renewal practices led me to pursue this topic. A qualitative phenomenological approach was utilized to conduct the study. The following three questions guided this phenomenological qualitative study:

1. Do private special education school leaders consider self-care and renewal practices to be important for themselves and their teachers?
2. What are the various ways private special education school leaders' report they promote self-care and renewal practices for themselves and their teachers?
3. What do private special education school leaders believe to be the factors and conditions that inhibit and foster their efforts to implement self-care and renewal practices for themselves and their teachers?

This chapter describes the design of the study, presents a rationale for the type of study selected and includes the process for recruiting participants, development of the instrumentation, methods for data collection and analysis, the role of the researcher, delimitations and limitations of the study and issues with trustworthiness.

Research Method Rationale

This qualitative study used a phenomenological method to explore the perceptions of the private special education school leaders regarding their role of promoting self-care and renewal practices for themselves and their teachers. The purpose of a phenomenological study is to find the essence of the lived experience of the participants. "In phenomenology, perception is

regarded as the primary source of knowledge, the source that cannot be doubted. Intentions, united with sensations, make up the full-bodied presence” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 52). By surveying and interviewing the leaders directly as part of this study, the researcher was able to gain insight into their roles as it pertains to self-care and renewal for themselves and their teachers.

Phenomenologists would argue that science fails to examine the person who had the lived experience in the process of inquiry (Moustakas, 1994). Phenomenology aims “to determine what the experience means for the people who have had the experience” while seeking to eliminate anything that could be a bias (Moustakas, 1994, p. 1). The researcher must look at everything openly without preconceived notions.

There is research conducted on the benefits of self-care and renewal and schools implementing such practices for the benefit of the students. However, there has been little research done on self-care and renewal practices for special education teachers who work in particularly challenging environments to help with problems concerning burnout, low staff morale, absenteeism, chronic stress, low job satisfaction, demoralization, and more. Likewise, there is little to no research on the impact a leader can have by promoting self-care and renewal practices for their teachers and acting as an exemplar for the approaches.

To understand the problem, it is important to understand the perceptions of private special education school leaders in their role. The private special education schools work with the most challenging students. The teachers in these schools work longer school days, a longer school year and are generally paid less than their public-school counterparts despite having to meet the same educator licensing requirements of the state. As a leader in private special education schools, they are really in a position to impact the culture and working conditions for

their teachers. While private special education schools are heavily regulated and adhere to various state and federal laws and regulations, there is some flexibility that they can exercise over the structure of their programs and the schedule of the day.

To get at the essence of this issue, a phenomenological approach was the best fit to understand the leader's perspective and to inform practice to alleviate some of the negative aspects that can accompany being a teacher in these settings.

Selection of Participants and Setting

For this study, the participants were recruited from the private special education schools who are **maaps** members located in Massachusetts providing services to children until the age of 22 when they are no longer eligible for special education services per state regulation. There are approximately 85-day school programs which fit this criterion. The participants were recruited from the **maaps** member database, which includes leaders such as Executive Directors, Program Directors, Principals, and Education Directors. The list of potential participants included 350 professionals who are identified as education leaders in **maaps** schools. This list included professionals in various roles described above at the schools. Participants were asked to identify their role at the school as part of the survey data collection. Seventy leaders or 20% participated in this study.

Participants were asked to consent to participate and complete an online survey (see Appendix A). From the online survey results, nine participants were contacted for a more in-depth follow-up interview. Eight of the nine interviews occurred over the telephone, and one of the interviews took place in person.

Instrumentation

Data for this study were collected using two methods, an online survey (see Appendix B), and a follow-up interview (see Appendix D). Both the survey and the interview were designed and crafted to answer the three guiding research questions of this study. Creswell and Poth (2018) stress the importance of interviewing as a data collection method for a phenomenological study. Furthermore, Creswell and Poth (2018) describe the interview as an attempt “to understand the world from the subjects’ point of view, to unfold the meaning of their experiences, to uncover their world” (p. 164). The study was designed this way to ensure that the researcher could explore in-depth the perceptions of private special education school leaders.

The survey and the interview protocol were designed during August – December 2018. Both instruments were created at the same time, and they sought to answer the three guiding research questions. The questions on the survey and interview were formed given the extensive research done during the review of the literature outlined in Chapter Two. With the knowledge gained from the literature review, the instruments were designed.

An online survey was created using Qualtrics software and went through several revision periods with the researchers’ doctoral committee to revise the survey questions to produce the final version of the survey (see Appendix B). Following the approval of the doctoral committee, the study received the approval of the **maaps** Board of Directors in October 2018 and the Human Services Committee approval at Lesley University in December 2018. The survey was then emailed to 350 leaders in the **maaps** member database. Reminders emails were sent to potential participants until the data collection period closed at the end of January 2019.

The survey questionnaire consisted of twelve questions, ten of which were Likert-style scale questions. One question contained thirty-seven different statements pertaining to self-care activities with four scales each. The scales were evaluating the importance, frequency,

effectiveness, and impact of each of the statements. Two of the survey questions were open-ended questions. Participants were also asked to list their position at the school to help determine who at the schools were completing the surveys. This was important to know because in the **maaps** member schools, there are multiple leadership positions such as Executive Director, Program Director, Education Director, among others who could complete the survey. Some of these roles are the primary decisionmakers while others are the primary support for the teachers, but not necessarily the decisionmakers of the organization.

An interview protocol was designed as a follow-up to the survey for in-depth data collection (see Appendix D). The interview consisted of 17 questions aimed at exploring the three guiding research questions more intensely. The interview questions differed from the survey questions in that they were all open-ended.

Data Collection Procedures

Data for this study were collected through an online survey and follow-up interviews. Creswell and Poth (2018) identified interviews as a common method for data collection in phenomenological qualitative studies. The survey allowed the researcher to collect data from multiple leaders in private special education schools, and the interviews allowed for a more in-depth view of their roles as it pertains to self-care and renewal.

The private special education school leaders received an email on December 6, 2018, with an invitation to participate and consent with a direct link to the Qualtrics survey (see Appendix A and B). The estimated completion time of 20-25 minutes for the survey was also provided to the potential participants, and information about opting in or out, and the follow-up interview was included. This ensured that the participants made a knowledgeable decision about their participation in this study. Participants were also informed that they would remain

anonymous throughout the process. Participants were asked to leave their contact information if they consented to a follow-up interview. However, pseudonyms would be used in the study and any subsequent reports from the study. Potential participants received reminder emails as well requesting their participation in the survey following the initial request.

Survey data were collected from the Qualtrics software online for six weeks from December 2018 to January 2019. During that time, seventy survey responses were received. The raw data were analyzed using Qualtrics reporting features, visualizations, and Microsoft Excel. The Qualtrics data were downloaded into a Microsoft Excel file for further analysis. Data collected from survey questions number one through seven, eleven and twelve were analyzed in Microsoft Excel, including calculating averages and creating graphs, figures, and tables to display the data.

From the seventy responses, the researcher reviewed the data looking for high and low practitioners of self-care and renewal as reported by the survey participants from leaders in private special education schools. The researcher was seeking a variety of perspectives during the interview process. A total of nine interviews were conducted. Creswell and Poth (2018) recommend a range of anywhere from 5-25 interviews. A second letter was sent to the follow-up interview participants for their consent and signature (see Appendix C). Eight of the nine interviews took place over the telephone, and one interview was conducted in person during the last two weeks of January 2019.

The in-person interviews were recorded using an external microphone attached to the researcher's computer and converted into an mp3 file. The eight telephones interviews were conducted using a Google voice number that recorded the phone interviews and produced an mp3 file that was only available to the researcher. On average, the interviews lasted about 35-45

minutes. During the interview process, the researcher practiced good listening skills, as it is important that the interviewer is not a frequent speaker during the interview process (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The researcher must also remain respectful and courteous during the interview (Creswell & Poth, 2018). After the interviews were conducted, the interview recording was transcribed manually into a Microsoft Word document and double-checked for accuracy. Once the interview data were transcribed, the transcripts were uploaded into NVivo for coding and analysis.

During the data collection and analysis process, all data collected were saved on a USB flash drive, and on a password-protected computer. The researcher was the only person with access to the data. All the data collected were destroyed upon the completion of this study. This was to ensure the confidentiality and the anonymity of the participants. Since the researcher was known to the participants, this was particularly important to this study.

The survey and the interview were developed to address the three guiding research questions. Twelve questions were developed for the survey, including one multi-part question, and seventeen questions were developed for the follow-up interview. The topics for each question in the survey and follow-up interview are grouped by the guiding research questions below.

Guiding Research Question One: Do private special education school leaders consider self-care and renewal practices to be important for themselves and their teachers?

- The degree to which they consider self-care and renewal to be a priority for themselves and their teachers
- Percentage of time devoted to self-care and renewal practices for themselves and their teachers

- Benefits or negative aspects of self-care and renewal
- Process for determining areas of focus for self-care and renewal for themselves and their teachers
- Professional development experiences related to self-care and renewal for themselves and their teachers

Guiding Research Question Two: What are the various ways private special education school leaders' report they promote self-care and renewal practices for themselves and their teachers?

- Self-care and renewal behavior scale addressing importance, frequency, effectiveness, and impact of the various behaviors related to self-care and renewal
- Describe a typical day with regards to self-care and renewal for themselves
- Ways they promote self-care and renewal for their teachers, and which is the most or the least effective
- Experiences of self-care and renewal where they felt effective or ineffective

Guiding Research Question Three: What do private special education school leaders believe to be the factors and conditions that inhibit and foster their efforts to implement self-care and renewal practices for themselves and their teachers?

- The frequency of concerns from teachers around self-care and renewal
- Changes to their job that would help them promote self-care and renewal for their teachers
- Aspects of job that prohibit self-care and renewal for their teachers
- Working conditions and their impact on teacher's well-being

- Factors and conditions that prohibit and promote self-care and renewal for themselves and their teachers
- Supports needed to promote self-care and renewal as a leader
- Changes to the current workload to improve their effectiveness of promoting self-care and renewal practices for their teachers
- Describe a powerful lesson learned from self-care and renewal
- Describe a specific incident of the impact of self-care and renewal

Data Analysis and Synthesis

Using the online Qualtrics survey, 350 potential participants from the **maaps** member database received the survey (see Appendix B). The list consisted of the primary and secondary contacts from the **maaps** member schools and anyone who the member schools assign as their main education contacts. The schools inform **maaps** who they want to be a part of the **maaps** database and for what purposes.

Of those 350 potential participants, 70 private special education school leaders took the survey, which represents a 20% response rate. Of those 70 survey participants, nine participated in a follow-up interview. Once the data were collected, it was organized by the three guiding research questions. There were five survey questions and six interview questions to address guiding research question one. Additionally, there was one multi-part question on the survey addressing guiding research question two and five interview questions for the second research question. Lastly, for the third guiding research question, there were seven survey questions and another six interview questions to gain insight into the third research question.

Once the survey and interview data were organized, the coding process began. Saldana (2016) notes that “a code is a researcher-generated construct that symbolizes or translates data

and thus attributes interpreted meaning to each individual datum for later purposes of pattern detection, categorization, assertion or proposition development, theory building, and other analytic processes” (p. 4). Codes are the critical link between the data collected and the meaning or the analysis of the data (Saldana, 2016). “Just as a title represents and captures a book, film, or poem’s primary content and essence, so does a code represent and capture a datum’s primary content and purpose” (Saldana, 2016, p. 4). The basic analysis process that the researcher followed is outlined in Creswell and Poth (2018) as “organizing the data, conducting a preliminary read-through of the database, coding and organizing themes, representing the data, and forming an interpretation of them” (p. 181). The initial analysis of the survey data was done in Qualtrics, and then the raw data was downloaded into a Microsoft Excel file. From there, various graphs and calculations were conducted to scrutinize the data and code the data received from the participants for each of the three guiding research questions.

Data from the two open-ended survey question (numbers eight and ten) and all the data from the interviews were imported into NVivo for coding. Coding occurred by carefully dissecting the written responses and identifying the various codes from the responses of the participants. Codes were identified by examining common phrases and sentiments across the written survey responses and the interview questions. “A code in qualitative inquiry is most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data” (Saldana, 2016, p. 4). Once the codes were first determined, the second cycle of coding occurred to streamline the codes further. This allowed the researcher to begin to see common threads and emerging themes in the data analysis process.

Once the codes were streamlined, the researcher was able to identify various themes for each of the guiding research questions. Creswell and Poth (2018) define themes or categories as “broad units of information that consist of several codes aggregated to form a common idea” (p. 328). As soon as the themes were identified, they were translated into findings. A total of eight findings emerged from the data analysis. Theming allows the researcher to elaborate on the meaning of the data and determine the essence of the phenomenon (Saldana, 2016).

Role of the Researcher

The role of the researcher is important in a phenomenological study when identifying phenomena and trying to determine the essence of the lived experiences. Without careful consideration and preparation, the phenomenon of promoting self-care for oneself as a leader and their teachers could be clouded by the researcher’s beliefs about the phenomenon.

Many factors contribute to the researchers understanding and currently held beliefs about a given topic, but it is essential for the researcher to recognize their potential bias about the topic and understand that remaining completely unbiased is challenging. However, in qualitative research, the researcher must have had experience with the phenomenon being studied. In a process called bracketing, Creswell, and Poth (2018) note that the researcher must set themselves at a distance from their personal experiences to learn the lived experiences of the participants. This is not to say that the researcher forgets their personal experiences, but rather, the researcher must not let past knowledge influence the lived experiences of the participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The researcher must find a balance to be successful in this endeavor.

It was important in the process of conducting this study that the researcher did not let her experiences and held beliefs influence the participants. A phenomenology relies on the lived experience of the participants, not the researcher. Collecting data from several different

participants who share the lived experiences is key and bracketing out the researcher's experiences from the participants lived experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). However, the researcher's experience with self-care and renewal approaches and knowledge of the participants makes this study of interest, and it bolsters in the researcher's credibility to study this topic.

Philosophical Worldview

I work for the trade association called the Massachusetts Association of 766 Approved Private Schools (**maaps**). Therefore, I am known to the participants of this study and work with them regularly. I have a deep understanding of these schools and how they operate. Before working at **maaps**, I worked in a **maaps** member therapeutic high school as the Guidance Coordinator. Therefore, I am familiar with these types of schools from both an employee perspective and my role in supporting these schools at **maaps**. In my role at **maaps**, I recognize firsthand the challenges the professionals face who work in these schools as leaders, teachers, and other staff positions.

I have struggled with my self-care over the years in recovery for my disordered eating as well as overcoming additional obstacles I have faced in my life. Learning to take care of myself has been and continues to be a process and a journey. I can empathize with how challenging it can be to put your needs ahead of the needs of others, especially when faced with students who require such intense care and support to meet their needs. Teachers are typically drawn to the profession of teaching with a predisposition to want to help others and view their role as a teacher as a calling. This can make it easier to blur the lines between caring for one's self and putting someone else's needs ahead of their own. Especially when it concerns the needs of children.

For me, self-care is the first thing I stop doing as soon as I am feeling stressed or overwhelmed. The times I have routinely practiced self-care and renewal, I have experienced the vast benefits. I have also experienced what it is like when I am no longer taking care of myself, and outside influences have gotten in the way. Due to my experiences both personally and professionally, I am intensely passionate and interested in studying the topic of self-care and renewal.

Issues with Trustworthiness

As articulated earlier, at the time this study was conducted the researcher worked for **maaps**. Therefore, the researcher is known to the participants. This relationship presented a potential bias that could have impacted the credibility of the study. Although Creswell and Poth (2018) recommend that the researcher has a rapport with the participants to collect rich data during the study. Therefore, in the interest of full disclosure, the researcher was transparent during the process of conducting this study and obtained the approval of the **maaps** Board of Directors before the study began. This was to ensure the Board of Directors supported the study and the use of private special education school leaders as participants. Participants in the study did so without any risks associated with their participation.

Working with private special education schools for the past five years for **maaps** and another three working in a **maaps** member school, the researcher is very much aligned with the daily obstacles these leaders and teachers face. The researcher is very empathetic and sensitive to their challenges. Moustakas (1994) notes that in “phenomenological investigation the researcher has a personal interest in whatever she or he seeks to know; the researcher is intimately connected with the phenomenon” (p. 59). This was the case for this study. The researcher's

respect and admiration of the participants and the work they do did not cloud her judgment or impact her ability to conduct the study.

The researcher's connection to the topic aside from her job was also evaluated. Given her struggles of overcoming abuse at the hands of her father and battling an eating disorder for the better part of seventeen years, the researcher is very passionate about self-care and renewal practices. The researcher understands the benefits firsthand and what happens when you do not practice routine self-care and renewal. Furthermore, the researcher understands that the participants might not share her passion or interest in self-care, and they might not be interested in exploring this aspect of themselves or promoting it for their teachers. The researcher respected all perspectives and opinions shared by the participants as it is their lived experience. The researcher made certain that she did not let her personal experiences or knowledge of the participant's cloud or influence her judgment.

While the researcher empathizes with and understands the challenges private special education leaders are facing, she is not living that experience. Collecting first-person reports from the participants as occurred during this study through the data collection procedures ensured the validity of this phenomenological study (Moustakas, 1994). To increase the validity of the study, data were collected through multiple sources, including the extensive literature review, the survey, and interviews.

During this process, steps were taken to ensure the reliability of this study. If another researcher were to conduct this study in the same manner, they would produce similar results. Being the sole researcher of this study, there is no issue with different researchers interpreting data differently or processes being conducted under different circumstances, thus supporting the reliability of this study.

Delimitations and Limitations

In order to conduct this study, there were some aspects that were deliberately restricted or limited. The researcher intentionally limited the scope of the participants to make the study manageable. As a result, the sample was limited to private special education school leaders who are also **maaps** members. This study focused on the approved day schools of the **maaps** member programs. Other components of **maaps** member programs such as residential programs were not included in this study. These schools serve a population of students who are among the most challenging in Massachusetts and beyond, making them more susceptible to the negative aspects of teaching and leading. The researcher did not include leaders in other educational settings such as public schools, private, charter, or religious schools.

This study did not include the implementation of any self-care and renewal practices given time constraints, but rather, this study focused solely on leaders and their perception of their role supporting teachers with regards to self-care and renewal. Teachers or other faculty members were not selected to participate in the survey or the interviews.

Summary

This chapter outlined the research methodology used in this study to answer the three guiding research questions. This also included the philosophical worldview of the researcher. Furthermore, the role of the researcher and the rationale of this study was explored. Participant recruitment methods and instrument design were also explained. Data were collected using surveys and interviews. Seventy participants responded to the survey, and nine follow-up interviews were conducted. A detailed description of the data collection procedures and analysis was examined, including the coding process. Data were analyzed by identifying codes, and then themes. At that point, eight findings were discovered from the data analysis. Lastly, this chapter

outlined the issues with trustworthiness for this study, and delimitations and limitations were clarified for this study.

The next chapter focuses on the findings from the study and outlines all the data collected, themes, and the findings that emerged from the data analysis.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of private special education school leaders and their perception of their role regarding promoting self-care and renewal practices for themselves and their teachers. To achieve this goal, the study was guided by the following three research questions.

1. Do private special education school leaders consider self-care and renewal practices to be important for themselves and their teachers?
2. What are the various ways private special education school leaders' report they promote self-care and renewal practices for themselves and their teachers?
3. What do private special education school leaders believe to be the factors and conditions that inhibit and foster their efforts to implement self-care and renewal practices for themselves and their teachers?

Chapter three provided a detailed description of how each of the three guiding research questions was addressed throughout this study. Chapter four presents the data, analysis, themes, and findings from the study after each guiding research question. This chapter is organized into the following sections, introduction, demographic data collected, a presentation and analysis of the data with findings for each of the three guiding research questions, and a chapter summary.

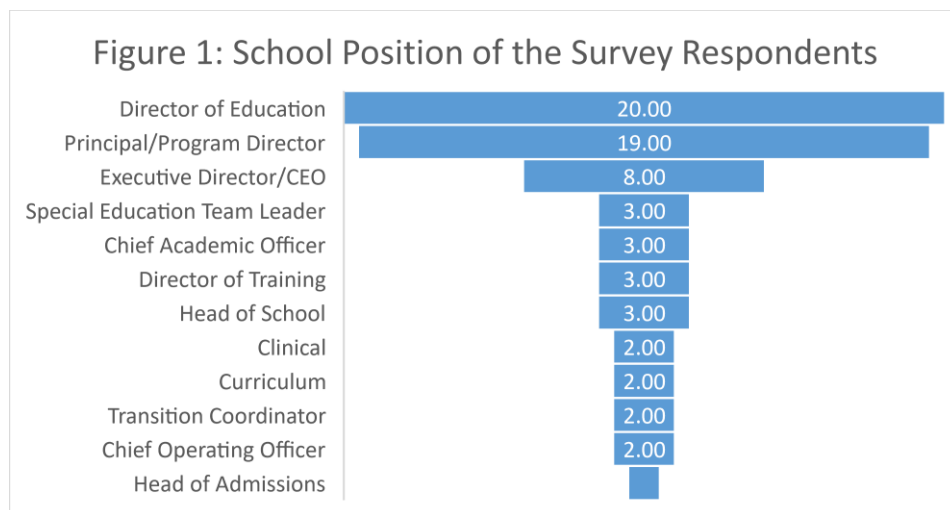
In the development of the instrumentation, each survey and interview question was carefully crafted to answer a particular guiding research question. Both the survey and interview questions intentionally asked the participants various inquiries about what they do for themselves regarding self-care and renewal and what they promote for their teachers in terms of self-care and renewal practices. Survey and interview questions were designed to elicit the direct response

of leaders regarding their lived experiences in their role and what self-care and renewal practices they prioritize.

In the following sections, each survey and interview question data are presented and analyzed with themes leading to findings.

Demographic Data Collection

Question one on the survey asked participants to identify their position at their schools. Since the survey was emailed to all education contacts as identified by the **maaps** member programs, it was important to see who was responding to their survey in terms of their role in the schools. Of the 70 survey respondents, the top three categories of respondents were Education Directors, Principal/Program Directors, and Executive Directors (see Figure 1) with twenty, nineteen and eight respondents identifying with each of those three positions. Figure 1 shows the breakdown of respondents and their roles from the most common position (Director of Education with twenty) to the least common position (Head of Admissions with one). The responses to this question do not specifically address any one of the three guiding research questions, but the data collected for survey question one paints a picture of the survey participants by providing demographic information.



The Director of Education positions in private special education schools are those who generally provide the most leadership and support for the teachers, but they are not necessarily the primary decisionmakers for the school or the larger organization.

The following two sections outline the data collected for both the survey and the follow-up interview questions pertaining to guiding research question one.

Data Collected for Guiding Research Question One – Do private special education school leaders consider self-care and renewal practices to be important for themselves and their teachers?

The data were collected in two parts. First, the online survey data were collected, followed by the interview data. The data collected for guiding research question one is outlined in the following sections.

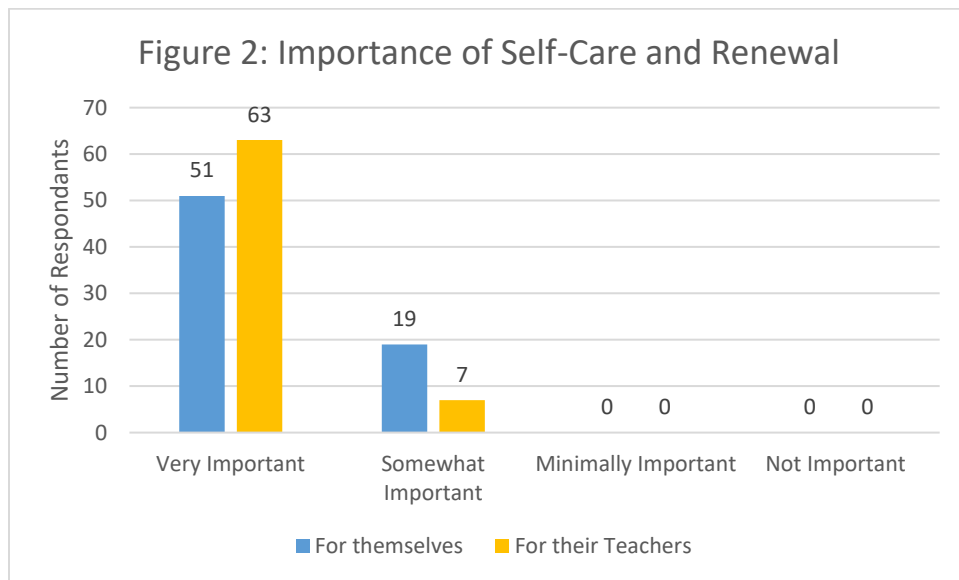
Survey Data Collected

Four survey questions (numbers two through five) were created to answer Guiding Research Question One. Survey question two asked on a Likert-style scale of very important, somewhat important, minimally important and not important, do you consider self-care and renewal practices to be important to your well-being? None of the respondents answered minimally important or not important at all. The most common answer was very important, with 51 respondents or 72.86% selecting that self-care and renewal practices were very important to their well-being. Nineteen respondents or 27.14% selected somewhat important as their answer.

Similarly, survey question three asked on a Likert-style scale of very important, somewhat important, minimally important and not important, do you consider self-care and renewal practices to be important to the well-being of your teachers? Like with survey question two, none of the respondents answered minimally important or not important at all. The most

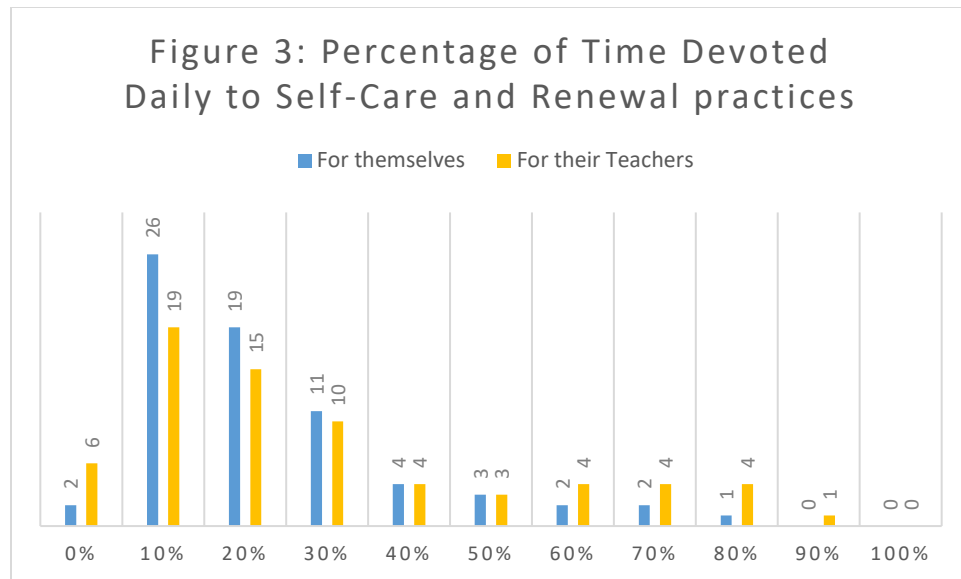
common answer was very important, with 63 respondents or 90% selecting that self-care and renewal practices were very important to their well-being. Seven respondents or 10% selected somewhat important as their answer (see Figure 2).

In reviewing the data from survey question two and three, twelve more respondents indicated that self-care and renewal practices are more important for their teachers than themselves. Figure 2 depicts the responses from both survey questions two and three and depicts how the respondents rated self-care and renewal for their teachers to be more important than more themselves as leaders.



Survey question four asked, on a scale of zero to 100%, what percentage of time day do private special education school leaders devote to self-care and renewal practices for themselves each day? None of the respondents selected 90-100%; the maximum response was 80% out the 70 participants. The most common response selected by twenty-six respondents indicates that they spend 10% of their day devoted to self-care and renewal practices for themselves (see Figure 3). Survey question five asked, similarly, on a scale of zero to 100%, what percentage of time do they devote to promoting self-care and renewal practices for their teachers each day?

Much like question four, no one selected 100%, but one person selected 90%. However, the most common response selected by 19 respondents was 10% of their day is devoted to self-care and renewal practices for their teachers (see Figure 3). Figure 3 depicts the survey data collected for both questions four and five and outlines the percentage of time leaders devote to self-care and renewal daily for themselves and their teachers.



Interview Data Collected

The first six questions of the interview further illuminated the first guiding research question. These six interview questions coupled with the survey questions for guiding research question one shed light on the priorities the private special education school leaders have on how they view self-care and renewal practices among all their responsibilities.

The first question of the interview asked participants to describe as many of the benefits to self-care and renewal as possible. Of the nine participants, six of them (66.67%) listed benefits such as better health, improved work performance, and improved quality of life. Two of the nine, (22.22%) respondents noted that a benefit of self-care and renewal practices is that it would impact retention in terms of keeping teachers longer. While no questions in this study were

directly aimed at retention, it can be hypothesized that retention would be impacted by self-care and renewal practices at private special education schools where retention is an issue that they are struggling to conquer. This was exemplified in the following quote from an interview respondent, “turnover can be a pretty significant challenge, in teaching in general, but especially working with the students that we have here. I don’t provide them nearly enough [self-care and renewal] for that, but it does help keep them longer and prevent them for looking for other jobs if they are able to find that work-life balance when they are not here.”

In contrast, question two of the interview asked the interview participants to describe any negative aspects of self-care and renewal. Four of the nine interviewees, (44.44%) indicated that they do not believe there are any negative consequences associated with practicing self-care and renewal. Three respondents (33.33%) felt that it was possible that self-care and renewal could be used as a distraction from things that need to get done, which could be considered negative. One participant, (11.11%) indicated that a negative aspect could also be if too much money were on self-care and renewal.

Question three of the interview asked the participants their process for determining areas to focus on regarding self-care and renewal practices for themselves. While one respondent indicated they do not have a process for this, the majority (88.88%) indicated that they can feel it in their bodies when they are getting burnt out, or run down, or need to step back and recalibrate themselves. Two respondents (22.22%) also explained that taking care of others helps their well-being, which is a typical response for those in helping professions. This is illustrated in the following quote from an interview participant, “seeing others be comfortable and happy helps make me more comfortable and happy. When I see other people sad and struggling, it can have a real impact on my mood and everything.”

Similarly, question four of the interview asked the participants their process for determining areas to focus on regarding self-care and renewal practices for their teachers. The responses to this question varied more than the responses to question three. No one described a clear process, but many responses depict an informal process. All the respondents (100%) referenced offering school-wide initiatives such as yoga classes, walking club, nutrition class, bringing in an outside licensed independent clinical social worker for staff, or hosting a surprise breakfast or other meal-related event for teachers. These initiatives were met with inconsistent degrees of success. One interview participant explained, “we’ve tried to offer yoga class, we tried to do like a school-wide walking club or something. I feel like there is less buy-in for something like that, and I tend to get a better response when it’s on an individual level.” However, a second interview respondent indicated that they have been offering weekly yoga for a \$10 fee for over a year, and it has been quite successful.

Another heavily referenced process for determining areas to focus on regarding self-care and renewal for their teachers was around various meeting structures whether it is weekly, or quarterly, respondents indicated that the well-being of the teachers and classroom dynamics and risks were often discussed among the supervisory and leadership teams during regularly scheduled meetings.

Similarly, to the responses for question three with sensing and feeling issues in their bodies, four interviewees (44.44%), described part of their process as paying attention to their staff, sensing when things are not going well, or noticing changes in their body language or demeanor for interview question four. Other respondents, five of the nine (55.55%) explained that they make a conscious effort to be visible in the school to the teachers through walkthroughs, walkabouts, going into classrooms, and lending themselves as a resource in an

open and supportive way. It was noted that these types of visits are not conducted to evaluate the teachers, but rather be visible and show support.

Question five of the interview asked the participants to describe the professional development experiences they have had that they feel have been useful in helping them use self-care and renewal practices for themselves. Among the respondents (77.77%), the most referenced professional development was the training and annual conference that **maaps** hosts as well as bringing in speakers to their schools on topics about self-care including managing stress and anxiety, mindfulness, positivity, and adventure-based counseling types of professional development. Two respondents (22.22%) noted that they had not had any training in their education programs, supervisory training, or in any previous public school leadership roles they have had. This is further described in the following quote, “I cannot remember having received any [professional development] on self-care in any of my educator preparation programs or any of my past public school [professional development]. I don’t remember ever attending something focused on self-care and certainly not in any of my supervisory training.”

Likewise, question six of the interview asked the participants to describe the professional development experiences they have had that they feel have been useful in helping them promote self-care and renewal practices for their teachers. The responses to this question varied greatly with some overlap to the responses for question five. When it comes to teachers, some leaders admit that they do not promote self-care and renewal as they are focused on training teachers on the practice of teaching, especially for new or waived teachers. The leaders are also occupied with training teachers to administer assessments, write Individualized Education Plans (IEPs), and conduct IEP team meetings in addition to daily teaching activities and curriculum

development. Others have brought in outside consultants to work with staff, or they send their teachers to relevant national conferences.

Analysis of Data Collected for Guiding Research Question One - Do private special education school leaders consider self-care and renewal practices to be important for themselves and their teachers?

The first guiding research question desired to determine how important self-care and renewal practices are for private special education school leaders and their teachers. In total, there were ten questions between the survey and the interview to address guiding research question one. Data for this question suggest that the private special education school leaders feel that self-care and renewal practices are very important for themselves and their teachers. There was a slight inclination towards self-care and renewal practices being more important for their teachers than themselves. Also, the private special education school leaders can clearly articulate the benefits of self-care and renewal, and most had difficulty identifying any negative aspects of self-care and renewal. Despite acknowledging the benefits of self-care and renewal practices for themselves and their teachers, none of the respondents have a clear and articulate process for determining areas to focus on with when it pertains to self-care and renewal practices although all the respondents indicated that they had tried offering various self-care and renewal activities to varying degrees of success for their teachers.

Given the importance that the leaders place on self-care and renewal, the private special education school leaders spend an average of 10% of their day devoted to self-care and renewal practices for themselves and their teachers. Ten percent of eight-hour workday averages to about 48 minutes a day devoted to self-care and renewal practices for themselves and their teachers.

Self-care and renewal practices do not appear to be an active area of focus for professional development activities for leaders or their teachers. While some of the respondents have brought in self-care and renewal experts for professional development or have attended a workshop, this was not reported as a priority area for offering routine self-care and renewal professional development activities.

Themes

Themes are the outcomes of the coding process, where the codes become sentences or phrases (Saldana, 2016). Thus, the themes that emerged, which ultimately led to the findings for guiding research question one is as follows: Self-care and renewal practices are valued but not reported by the respondents as actively practiced. The participants in this study recognize that there are many benefits to self-care and renewal practices and virtually no negative aspects to practicing self-care and renewal activities. The private special education school leaders' response indicated that they might put others before themselves in terms of recognizing the importance of self-care and tend to believe it is more important for others than themselves. Generally, interview respondents indicated that there is no set process for practicing or promoting self-care and renewal among the leaders, and this tends not to be an area of focus for professional development for either the leader or their teachers.

The following section outlines three findings after analyzing the data collected to answer guiding research question one.

Finding #1: Private special education school leaders believe self-care and renewal practices are more important for their teachers than themselves.

Self-care and renewal practices are important for leaders themselves and their teachers. Since leaders in this study are all helping professionals, it is not surprising that they place the

importance of self-care and renewal practices for their teachers above their own. However, the benefits of self-care and renewal are abundant, and practicing them can help lessen the negative aspects associated with being an educator such as increased stress, risk of burnout, compassion fatigue, and demoralization.

Finding #2: The importance of self-care and renewal practices that private special education school leaders expressed does not correlate to the amount of time they spend on self-care and renewal practices for themselves or their teachers.

All the respondents indicated that self-care and renewal practices were very important or somewhat important for themselves and their teachers, yet the majority indicated that they only spend about 10% of their day devoted to self-care and renewal practices for themselves and their teachers. This breaks down to less than one hour a day. Many respondents wished they could devote more time as they see this as important and as a priority; however, in their current environments, this is not feasible.

The definition of self-care and renewal stresses that it is a foundational, daily, routine process addressing a person's psychological and emotional well-being (Cook-Cottone, 2007). Renewal is also an ongoing, evolving process (Goodlad, 2004). Something as beneficial and important as self-care and renewal cannot be practiced in a reactive way when issues arise, or occasionally addressed, but rather embedded into the culture of the school and practiced routinely.

Finding #3: Private special education school leaders and their teachers would likely benefit from specific, tailored plans developed to address the area of self-care and renewal.

Since the leaders recognize self-care and renewal practices as important and understand the benefits, a clear plan should be developed for themselves and their teachers to ensure that

self-care and renewal do not get pushed to the side when competing demands arise. When activities are scheduled and built into the existing calendars and practices, they tend to be more successfully executed as opposed to waiting for opportunities to include them. It is easy to push self-care and renewal activities off when faced with deadlines and other responsibilities.

Leaders could use a plan for themselves and for teachers to execute. If you plan for self-care activities, they are more likely to happen. Again, for the teachers, a plan needs to be developed for them as well with a variety of offerings and flexibility to access the offerings without feeling like it is a burden to participate. The negative aspects that are associated with teaching and being a leader, such as chronic stress or burnout are not lessened by a one-time remedy. One professional development offering on mindfulness is not likely to have any lasting impact. Self-care and renewal must be practiced routinely and daily to reap the full array benefits associated with regular self-care and renewal practices.

If the leader themselves practice self-care and renewal in a routinized way, they will perhaps be more skilled to impart this upon others and be more attuned with what the teachers need, therefore they will be better able to develop a plan for their teachers and build it into the culture if they are actively practicing a variety of approaches to self-care and renewal.

The next section presents the data, analysis, themes, and defines findings for the second guiding research question.

Data Collected for Guiding Research Question Two – What are the various ways private special education school leaders’ report they promote self-care and renewal practices for themselves and their teachers?

As with guiding research question one, the data collection occurred in two parts for the second guiding research question, the survey data, and the interview data. The following outlines the data collected according to guiding research question two.

Survey Data Collected

Survey question nine was a multi-part survey question that asked participants to rank several different behaviors and activities about self-care and renewal. This question was crafted to examine guiding research question two, which studies the various ways that private special education school leaders promote self-care and renewal practices for themselves and their teachers.

The question measured 37 different behaviors for the survey respondents to address in four different categories. The four categories were the importance of the behavior to the respondent, frequency of implementation, effectiveness in doing so, and the impact of the behavior. For each of the 37 behaviors, each of the four categories had a scale of 1-4 (1=None; 2=Little; 3=Some; 4=Most). This question allowed the researcher to investigate the behaviors and obtain greater clarity as to what exact behaviors the respondents are enacting in terms of self-care and renewal practices for themselves and their teachers.

To analyze this question and all of the components, the mean for each of the 37 behaviors was calculated. The mean is defined as “a type of average calculated by summing values and dividing that sum by the number of values” (Salkind, 2016, p. 465). From there, the behaviors were separated into self-care and renewal practices or behaviors for the leader themselves and then what they report they promote for their teachers to get a sense of where the priorities are and how they promote self-care and renewal practices.

There were twelve instances where the survey asked about a certain behavior for the leader and then the same behavior for their teachers. For example, “I reflect or meditate” was one behavior question, and following that question, “I encourage my teachers to reflect or practice meditation.” In eleven of the twelve instances, the leader scored importance, frequency, effectiveness, and impact as less for the teacher than themselves. This means that even if the leader is practicing the behaviors themselves, they did not report on the survey as necessarily promoting the practices for their teachers. The only instance where the leader scores the teachers higher than themselves was around the behavior, “I provide a schedule where my teachers have time to eat and hydrate during the day.” Leaders place more emphasis on making sure their teachers’ hydrate and eat than for themselves.

When looking specifically at each behavior in terms of importance, frequency, effectiveness, and impact, similar behaviors consistently ranked high or low on all scales. The following (Table 1) outlines each of the four categories (importance, frequency, effectiveness, and impact) and which three behaviors ranked highest and lowest for importance, frequency, effectiveness, and impact. When asked about promoting behaviors for teachers such as yoga, stretching, relaxing activities, reflection, or meditation, the respondents reported as not promoting these types of activities, and they consistently ranked in the lower categories. This is consistent with what they reported they practice for themselves. The respondents did not report as regularly practicing those same activities for themselves.

Table 1

Highest and Lowest Ranked Behaviors.

Three highest-ranked behaviors	Three lowest-ranked behaviors
IMPORTANCE	IMPORTANCE
<i>I support and enjoy camaraderie with my teachers.</i>	<i>I encourage my teachers to practice gentle yoga and stretching.</i>

<i>I encourage my teachers to collaborate and support each other, and I provide time for them to do so.</i>	<i>I practice gentle yoga and stretching.</i>
<i>I make certain that my teachers are supported by their colleagues and are not isolated.</i>	<i>I promote relaxing hobbies for my teachers such as knitting, cooking, crafting, etc.</i>
FREQUENCY	FREQUENCY
<i>I support and enjoy camaraderie with my teachers.</i>	<i>I encourage my teachers to practice gentle yoga and stretching.</i>
<i>I encourage my teachers to collaborate and support each other, and I provide time for them to do so.</i>	<i>I practice gentle yoga and stretching.</i>
<i>I provide safe and healthy working conditions for my teachers.</i>	<i>I reflect or practice meditation.</i>
EFFECTIVENESS	EFFECTIVENESS
<i>I support and enjoy camaraderie with my teachers.</i>	<i>I encourage my teachers to practice gentle yoga and stretching.</i>
<i>I encourage my teachers to collaborate and support each other, and I provide time for them to do so.</i>	<i>I encourage my teacher to reflect or practice meditation.</i>
<i>I make certain that my teachers are supported by their colleagues and are not isolated.</i>	<i>I practice gentle yoga and stretching.</i>
IMPACT	IMPACT
<i>I support and enjoy camaraderie with my teachers.</i>	<i>I encourage my teachers to practice gentle yoga and stretching.</i>
<i>I provide safe and healthy working conditions for my teachers.</i>	<i>I encourage my teacher to reflect or practice meditation.</i>
<i>I encourage my teachers to collaborate and support each other, and I provide time for them to do so.</i>	<i>I practice gentle yoga and stretching.</i>

Interview Data Collected

There were five interview questions (numbers 7-11) directed at illuminating guiding research question two. What are the various ways private special education school leaders' report they promote self-care and renewal practices for themselves and their teachers? This question allowed for a deeper dive into the lived experiences of private special education school leaders.

Interview question seven asked participants to communicate what a typical day looks like for them in terms of self-care and renewal from the time they wake up until they go to bed. After

examining the data collected for this question, several common ideas emerged. Four of the respondents, (44.44%) specified a regular workout routine that ranged from a long bike ride to riding the treadmill every morning or a combination of cardio and weights daily. Four respondents (44.44%) indicated spending time with family on a typical day, including spouses, partners, children, siblings, and parents. Other typical daily activities described by participants included watching or listening to the news, having a cup of coffee before work, eating dinner in the evening, watching television, and getting up early to get a head start to the day ahead.

Among the interview responses, some additional activities described potentially lend themselves to a self-care and renewal routine such as lighting scented candles for relaxation, using dinnerware typically reserved for special occasions, listening to music, taking time to get ready in the morning, preparing lunches, making phone calls to loved ones, and having an attitude of gratitude.

Only two of the respondents (22.22%) indicated that they do not skip meals and have lunch at school daily, which indicated that seven of the nine (77.77%) typically skip meals during the workday. Two comments from the interviewees indicated that the respondents are constantly connected to their job thanks to modern technology and a second respondent who indicated that they rarely get to eat during the day or if they do it is very late in the day. These behaviors are not supportive of self-care and renewal practices.

Interview question eight asked the participants to describe the ways they promote self-care and renewal for their teachers. The most commonly noted way by six of the nine respondents (66.67%) was through specific activities which ranged from hosting Crockpot Wednesdays, or Tasty Thursdays where the teachers have lunch, or a meal provided for them. Other methods included having a therapy dog at the school, offering daycare services or yoga

classes for the teachers. There were an additional six references to encouraging staff to spend time together, not talking about work, and fostering a personal connection amongst the teachers. Some ideas for how this is accomplished is through a private staff room that feels “home-like,” or teacher bingo and trivia activities. The next common way that the private special education school leaders promote self-care and renewal for their teachers is through a wellness newsletter, a glow committee, an inspirational bulletin board, sharing opportunities that may be of interest, bringing in presenters and hosting professional development sessions around the topic of self-care and renewal.

As a follow-up to question eight, question nine of the interview asked the interviewees to describe which of the ways they promote self-care and renewal practices for their teachers, which are the most effective and least effective and why. The most effective way the private special education school leaders promote self-care and renewal pertained to food, such as Tasty Thursdays where teachers are being provided a meal during the day. The second most effective way pertained to instances where the leaders could give the teachers time, either time to work on something work-related or non-work related.

The least effective way to promote self-care and renewal were those activities that would require the teachers to work a longer day either by coming in early or staying late. Respondents noted that Employee Assistance Programs tend to be ineffective at promoting self-care and renewal. Also, one interviewee discussed a sabbatical program that they initiated at their school with hopes of it offering a respite for their teachers to promote self-care and renewal, but sadly, in this instance, it ended up becoming a burden for the leader to schedule the sabbaticals and some teachers took advantage of it in a way that was not helpful for the school. In this instance, the leader did not feel the sabbatical program was effective in practice.

Question ten of the interview asked the respondents to describe two to three satisfying experiences in which they felt most effective in helping teachers utilize self-care and renewal practices. The most common response with three of the nine participants (33.33%) like question nine was those experiences around food, Crockpot Wednesday, or Tasty Thursday, and such. The rest of the interviewees describes some examples such as mindfulness or gratitude activities at staff meetings or making accommodations for teachers due to an individualized circumstance like letting a teacher work from home one day a week or another specialized accommodation.

Correspondingly, question eleven of the interview asked respondents to describe two to three least satisfying experiences in which they felt least effective in helping teachers utilize self-care and renewal practices. The most common least satisfying experiences (44.44% of the respondents) were those experiences that the leaders felt they missed a subtle cue from a teacher. For example, not realizing the teachers needed a break after a difficult incident or recognizing that the teacher just needed to vent and was not looking to the leader to solve anything, and lastly, the leader felt they were being supportive in a situation, but did not recognize that the teacher was feeling differently. In these instances, the leaders felt ineffective as they missed cues from their teachers or misinterpreted a situation.

Also, 33.33% of the respondents described instances where they felt least effective that pertained to time. Specifically, not being able to give a teacher adequate time on a task due to other competing responsibilities or not being able to offer breaks or offering breaks but teachers not taking advantage of them as other demands often take precedence over self-care and renewal. In these instances, the leaders felt ineffective as they wanted to do more, but the time did not allow them to do so.

Analysis of Data Collected for Guiding Research Question Two - What are the various ways private special education school leaders' report they promote self-care and renewal practices for themselves and their teachers?

Following guiding research question one, guiding research question two wanted to determine the ways that private special education leaders report they promote self-care and renewal practices for themselves and their teachers. To illuminate guiding research question two, there were six questions crafted to answer guiding research question two between the survey and the interview.

The data collected and analyzed for guiding research question two suggests that teachers place more emphasis on their teachers well-being than themselves. When it comes to specific approaches to self-care and renewal such as gentle yoga, stretching, and meditation, very few leaders report promoting or practicing these activities. However, leaders are reporting as having promoted activities such as camaraderie, encouraging teachers to collaborate and support each other, and providing safe and healthy work environments.

All respondents indicated having routines that include a variety of self-care activities for themselves. Most of the leaders exercise, spend time with family and disconnect during after-work hours and they can articulate the benefits and the reasons why these activities are important for their well-being, but when it comes to promoting the same self-care and renewal practices for their teachers, they are less routinized. They reported seeing the importance and the benefits when something is offered, but it does not appear that self-care and renewal activities are being offered consistently enough to experience all the benefits. It also appears that they are not offering a variety of activities for self-care and renewal. Many leaders offer food-based self-care activities, like providing lunch for the teachers and private special education school leaders

indicated that activities like this are effective and satisfying. Food is a great way to bring people together and provide something nice for them but it is not necessarily going to have the same impact and benefits as a meditation practice, deep breathing exercises, or a brief walk outdoors. Offering opportunities for teachers to decompress and talk about non-work-related issues is a great way to practice self-care and renewal, but it should not be the only way. Self-care and renewal are more successful when there is a routine in place that includes a variety of approaches.

The least satisfying experiences for private special education school leaders were those where the leader missed a cue from the teacher. In a fast-paced environment like a school, it can be easy to miss subtle cues, but it is important for the leaders as part of their practice to be tuned into their teachers and their needs.

Themes

Several themes emerged in the coding process from the data collected for guiding research question two including the following: Private special education school leaders indicated as having promoted concepts of self-care and renewal such as collegial support, camaraderie, and monitoring novice teacher isolation, however, respondents are not reporting having promoted approaches to self-care and renewal like mindfulness, or meditation. Even if the leaders are practicing approaches to self-care and renewal such as meditation, mindfulness, and reflection themselves, it appears they do not promote the same practices for their teachers.

The following section outlines three findings after analyzing the data collected to answer guiding research question two.

Finding #4: The private special education school leaders should share their self-care and renewal practices with their teachers.

Leaders who report having actively practiced self-care and renewal and share their practices are perhaps more likely to inspire their teachers to do so as well. This can also make leaders better equipped to incorporate self-care and renewal practices into the regular activities at the school. This will also allow the leaders to support their teachers better when their self-care and renewal are suffering. The more versed and confident the leader is in this area, the better they can assist others and lead by example.

Finding #5: The private special education school leaders should promote self-care and renewal practices in a routine way built into the school culture.

The definition of self-care and renewal stresses that it is a foundational, continuous process that is part of a routine. It is not something that is practiced in a reactive way when stress is high, and teachers and leaders are feeling overwhelmed. While private special education school leaders value self-care and renewal practices for themselves and their teachers they are likely going to miss out on the benefits if they are not offering such activities in a structured, continuous manner built into the culture of the school.

If self-care and renewal practices are built into the culture of the school, then it is a part of what they do or the norm for the school, and it is not viewed as a burden. Several leaders described offerings such as regular yoga classes for a small fee, and they were not successful as it was “extra” or something else to pile onto their already busy schedules. It was not perceived as a benefit by the teachers. The leaders could budget with time and money for these activities and build them into the school structure, so it becomes part of the culture. This is not to imply that all teachers need to take yoga, but rather, there should be opportunities available for teachers to participate in what works best for them.

Finding #6: The private special education school leaders could benefit from practicing mindful leadership and reflective practices.

There were many references to leaders missing subtle cues from their teachers. By approaching leadership from a more mindful perspective, the leaders can be more reflective in their roles and perhaps more attuned to subtle cues from their teachers, which might be warning signs of a larger issue. Staying in the moment is challenging in a fast-paced environment like private special education schools when the leaders are being pulled in many different directions. However, it is critical for the success of leaders to do so for their well-being and the well-being of their teachers. This will likely aid them in being more present, and it will allow them to be more aligned with subtle behavior nuances and the body language of their teachers.

The following section presents the data for guiding research question three, along with the analysis, themes, and findings.

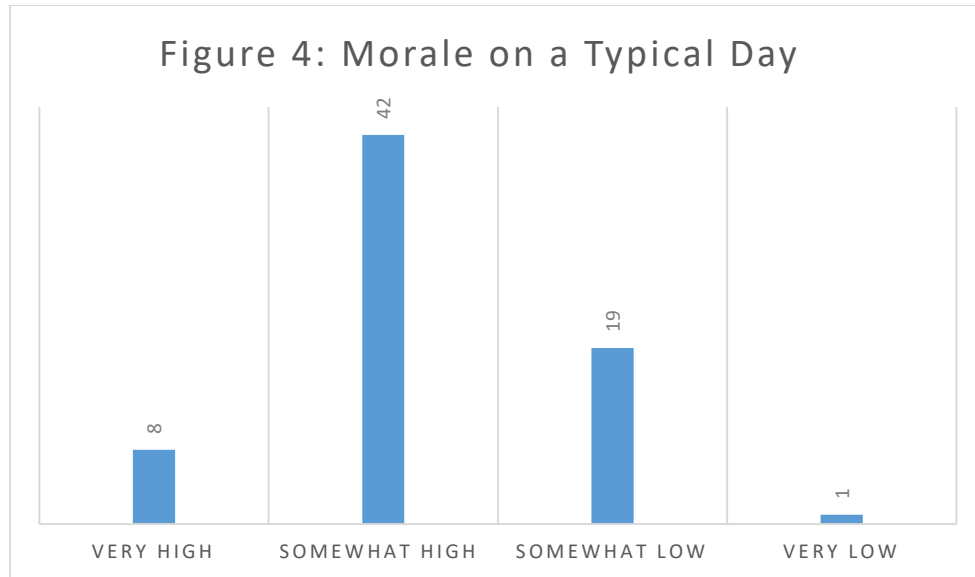
Data Collected for Guiding Research Question Three – What do private special education school leaders believe to be the factors and conditions that inhibit and foster their efforts to implement self-care and renewal practices for themselves and their teachers?

In the same way, data were collected for guiding research questions one and two, the data collected for guiding research question three were again broken into two parts; survey data and interview data.

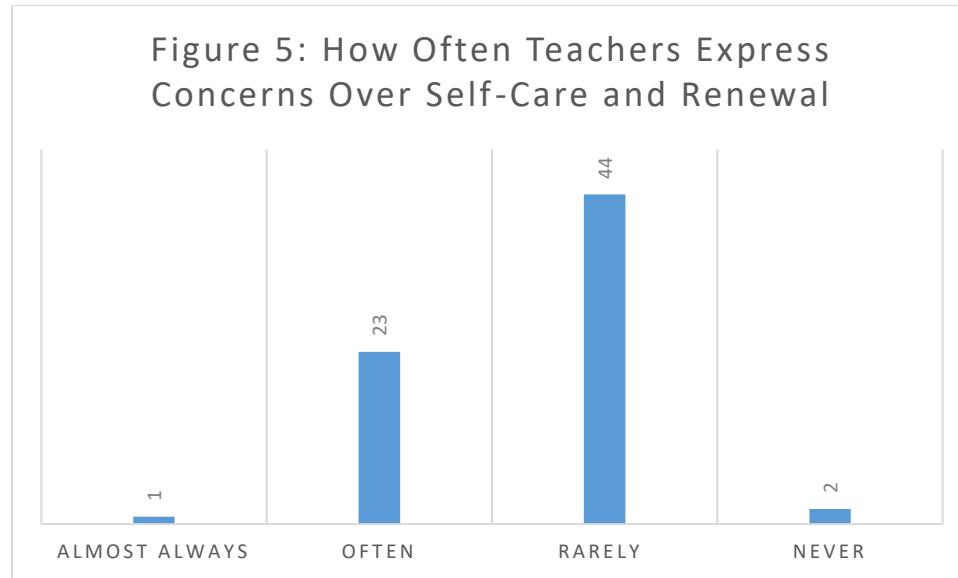
Survey Data Collected

There were six survey questions designed to illuminate guiding research question three. Survey question six asked for participants to rate the morale of their teachers on a typical day on a scale of very high, somewhat high, somewhat low, and very low. More than half of the respondents indicated the morale is very high to somewhat high. This represents 50 respondents

or 71.43%. Nineteen respondents selected somewhat low as a response, and only one person selected very low. Therefore 20 total participants or 28.57% of leaders ranked the morale of teachers on a typical day in the lower range (see Figure 4). Figure 4 illustrates the range of responses and how the survey respondents ranked the morale of their teachers on a typical day. This figure shows how many respondents were in the high versus low range for morale.



Survey question seven asked the private special education schools leaders how often their teacher express concerns over their self-care and renewal on a scale of almost always, often, rarely and never. Forty-four respondents indicated that their teachers rarely or never express concerns over their self-care and renewal, while 23 respondents (32.86%) indicated their teachers often express concerns. One respondent indicated, almost always (see Figure 5). Therefore 24 respondents (24.29%) indicated that their teachers often or almost always express concerns regarding their self-care and renewal. Figure 5 illustrates the responses for question seven and depicts that about a quarter of the participants report that their teachers express concerns with regards to their self-care and renewal.



Survey question eight, asked participants to respond to the following open-ended question, what changes to their job would help them promote self-care and renewal practices for their teachers? The data from this question were exported from Qualtrics into a Microsoft Excel file and then imported into NVivo for coding and analysis. The most common response, representing 28.57% of the respondents related to time, specifically needing more time to promote self-care and renewal for their teachers. With all that must be accomplished in a school daily, finding time to promote self-care and renewal is not being reported as a high priority when compared to everything else. One survey respondent noted the following about self-care and renewal, “it needs to be structured into the day, or it doesn’t happen as people are too busy. It is valued yet not practiced.”

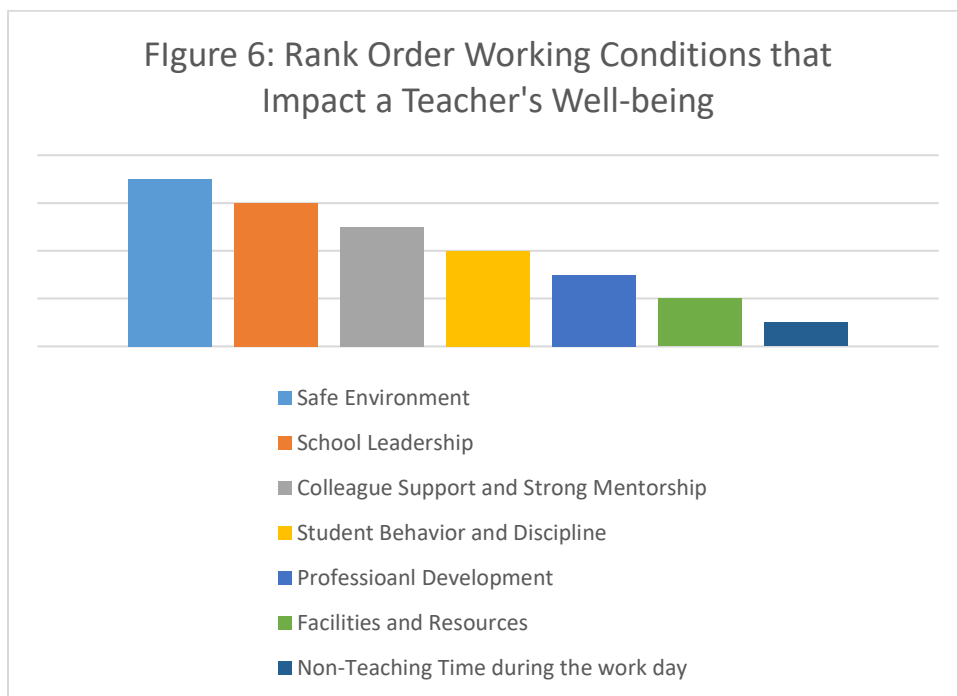
Appropriate staff, money, and resources were the second most common response with seventeen or 24.29% of the respondents indicating this would help them promote self-care and renewal for their teachers. Adequate staffing is a common issue in private special education schools as turnover is high. However, many approaches to self-care and renewal cost little to no money to practice.

Survey question ten, asked participants to respond to the following open-ended question, what aspects of your job inhibit you from promoting self-care and renewal practices for your teachers? The data from this question were exported from Qualtrics into a Microsoft Excel file and then imported into NVivo for coding and analysis. More than half (58.57%) of the respondents for question ten indicated time or lack thereof as the biggest aspect that inhibits them from promoting self-care and renewal practices for their teachers. There are lots of compelling and conflicting demands as a leader and as a teacher in any school. This is further exacerbated in private special education schools given the specialized populations of students. One survey respondent described it as such: “The pace can be really intense sometimes. Often, I run from meeting to meeting, leaving little time for self-care and renewal until I crash on the weekends. I’ve made a concerted effort over the past several years to have ‘mini-renewal’ periods throughout the day.”

Additionally, 20% of respondents identified the schedule and staffing as an aspect that inhibits their efforts to promote self-care and renewal. It is hard to find and retain staff, and the structure of the day and the demands on everyone’s time is often inflexible and does not lend itself easily to finding time for self-care and renewal.

Survey question eleven asked participants to rank several working conditions by asking, in your opinion, please rank the following teacher working conditions by how they impact a teacher’s well-being and job satisfaction. Rank Order 1 – most important, 7 – least important: non-teaching time during the workday, facilities and resources, student behavior and discipline, professional development, school leadership, colleague support, and strong mentorship, and safe environment. The most common response that impacts a teacher’s well-being and job satisfaction is a safe environment. Fourteen respondents or 20% indicate this as the most

important working condition. A close second, with thirteen respondents or 19% is school leadership. Next is colleague support and strong mentorship with eleven respondents, or 16%. Student behavior and discipline had ten respondents or 14%. Nine respondents or 13% indicated professional development was the most important working condition. Eight respondents or 11% selected facilitates and resources and lastly, non-teaching time during the workday ranked the least important, with only 7% or five respondents selecting that option (see Figure 6). Figure 6 outlines the rank order according to the 70 survey respondents from most important (safe environment) to least important (non-teaching time during the workday).



Survey question twelve asked participants to indicate on a scale of not an issue (1) to a minor issue (2), to somewhat of an issue (3) and a major issue (4) the following risks associated with being an educator. The issues commonly associated with teaching are chronic stress, compassion fatigue, teacher absenteeism, novice teacher isolation, lack of knowledge around self-care and renewal practices, risk of burnout, demoralization, lack of self-awareness for the teacher, and not properly prepared for the reality of being a teacher.

Twenty-nine respondents or 41.43% indicated a major issue for their teachers in their school is the risk of burnout. That is the only risk that that scored in the major issue category. Forty respondents or 57.14% indicated that chronic stress is somewhat of an issue at their school for their teachers. Compassion fatigue is also somewhat of an issue with twenty-nine respondents or 41.43% indicating as such. Teacher absenteeism, lack of knowledge around self-care and renewal practices, demoralization, lack of self-awareness for the teachers, and not being properly prepared for the reality of being a teacher all ranked as a minor issue. Novice teacher isolation does not appear to be an issue from the respondents. Thirty-four respondents or 48.57% indicate that this is not an issue for them at their schools (see Table 2). Table 2 depicts the common risks associated with being a teacher and shows where they fall in terms of major, somewhat, minor, or not an issue as reported by the leaders in this study.

Table 2

Common Risk Associated with Being a Teacher

Major Issue	Somewhat of an Issue	Minor Issue	Not an Issue
Risk of burnout	Chronic stress	Teacher absenteeism	Novice teacher isolation
	Compassion fatigue	Lack of knowledge around self-care and renewal practices	
		Demoralization	
		Lack of self-awareness for the teacher	
		Not properly prepared for the reality of being a teacher	

Interview Data Collected

The second part of the data collection was achieved through follow-up interviews. To further illuminate guiding research question three, there were six interview questions (numbers 12-17) specifically designed to help answer the question of what private special education school leaders believe to be the factors and conditions that inhibit and foster their efforts for promoting self-care and renewal practices for themselves and their teachers.

Interview question twelve asked the participants the factors and conditions that inhibit them from promoting self-care and renewal practices for themselves. The leading response was time with 66.66% of the interviewees indicating that time is the biggest factor that inhibits their efforts. The second and third most common factors with two (22.22%) of the nine respondents indicating that both financial constraints inhibit their efforts and their own prioritizing such as putting others needs before their own or not seeing self-care and renewal as a priority for themselves.

Interview question thirteen asked the participants what factors and conditions help them promote self-care and renewal practices for themselves. Four of the nine interviewees (44.44%) indicated that their administrative team and a supportive community of colleagues and supervisors help them to promote self-care and renewal practices for their teachers. Again, time emerged as the second most common response (22.22%), and that if leaders could find the time, they could promote self-care and renewal.

Question fourteen of the interview asked the participants what kinds of support they would need as a leader to promote self-care and renewal practices for themselves and their teachers. The most common response (55.55%) pertained to interpersonal support of those people around the leader. Support for this question pertained to both administrative support from leaders higher in the organization than those who were interviewed and additional support from their teams.

The second most common response (44.44%) pertained to resources for the staff, including adequate staffing, a higher retention rate, so they are not constantly hiring and training, and substitute teachers. Given the highly specialized nature of private special education schools, it is very difficult, if not impossible, to find substitute teachers. This is exemplified in the

following quote from an interviewee, “we are tough around here, in truth we don’t have substitutes. We have a very unique methodology, and it takes a long time to get up to speed. If someone is out, whether it’s long or short term, whatever...we just absorb it.” Tied with adequate staffing for the most common response (44.44%) was related to money. The interviewees indicated that with more financial support, they could promote self-care and renewal more for their teachers, mostly through professional development or hiring additional staff to support these efforts.

Interview question fifteen asked the respondents to identify what changes should be made to their current workload so that they might become more effective at helping teachers utilize self-care and renewal practices. For this question, 33.33% of the interviewees recognized that they could prioritize their time better and make self-care and renewal more of a priority. Furthermore, 22.22% of interviewees indicated that they have plenty of flexibility, and their workload is manageable while another 22.22% indicated a reduction and meetings they must attend and less competing demands on their time would be a welcomed change to their current workload and make it feasible for them to promote self-care and renewal more for their teachers.

To further investigate the lived experiences of private special education school leaders, interview question sixteen asked the participants to share the most powerful lesson that they have learned regarding self-care and renewal practices. While everyone’s response was personal, there are commonalities amongst the respondents. Four of the nine (44.44%) respondents shared a lesson related to age, meaning that they have learned over the years that they need to take better care of themselves. This realization was caused by a variety of events ranging from a health-related incident to feeling burnt-out and needing a change of pace.

The final interview question seventeen asked the participants to describe a specific incident of how self-care and renewal practices impacted them as a leader. Many of the responses related to question sixteen with the health issue, for example. Something like a health scare can be a specific incident and a powerful lesson pertaining to self-care and renewal practices. This is further exemplified in this quote from an interviewee,

There was one incident a couple of months back where I let my own health go to the curb because I'm so in tune with making sure everyone else is ok. And that was really unnerving for me because I'm as healthy as a horse and never get sick and that was an overwhelming experience to not be in control of my own body. So, I think that perspective gave me extreme insight, because that impacted my work life, my home life, and all of the other things that I am engaged in. From that perspective, you take for granted your own physical health. That's not smart. You need to take it and put it into perspective...that helped me put a different lens on myself.

This quote from an interviewee encapsulates the importance of self-care, which is not letting our health "go to the curb." Many of the leaders who participates in this study reported as having to learn to take better care of themselves as opposed to doing it proactively or naturally before the occurrence of a health scare or other life-altering incidents.

Analysis of Data Collected for Guiding Research Question Three - What do private special education school leaders believe to be the factors and conditions that inhibit and foster their efforts to implement self-care and renewal practices for themselves and their teachers?

Along with guiding research question one and two, guiding research question three sought to determine what the factors and condition are that inhibit and foster private special

education school leaders' efforts in implementing self-care and renewal practices for themselves and their teachers. To examine this question, data were collected from thirteen survey and interview questions that were crafted specifically for guiding research question three.

Respondents indicated that overall, the morale of their teachers on a typical day is somewhat high and that their teachers rarely express concerns over their self-care and renewal. However, when examining the factors and conditions, private special education school leaders overwhelmingly indicated that time is an issue, and that time inhibits their efforts to promote self-care and renewal for themselves and their teachers. Changes to their schedule, appropriate staffing, and resources were also outlined as factors and conditions that could help leaders promote self-care and renewal practices for themselves and their teachers. The leaders also indicated that their administrative team and supportive colleagues help them promote self-care and renewal.

When examining working conditions for teachers, private special education school leaders indicated that a safe environment is the number one working condition that impacts a teacher's well-being with school leadership as the second most important. Both working conditions are aspects of self-care and renewal. Participants also indicated that their teachers are at risk for burnout and that it is a major issue for them. Chronic stress and compassion fatigue were indicated as an issue also.

Themes

A reoccurring theme about guiding research question three is time. This was briefly mentioned by the participants during the data collection in guiding research question two as well, but it was a dominant theme throughout the data collection for guiding research question three as a major factor and condition that inhibits private special education schools' leaders. Leaders and

teachers struggle to find time to do everything the job requires and on top of that finding time to practice or promote self-care and renewal. When some leaders have tried promoting activities such as weekly yoga, in some cases, if it required teachers to come in early, spend money, or stay late, they were not successful.

Additional themes that developed were adequate staffing, scheduling, and support of colleagues as factors and conditions can either help leaders promote self-care and renewal for themselves and their teachers or can inhibit their efforts. Also, leaders reported that their teachers are at risk of burnout, so that was a theme that was revealed during the coding process of the data.

Finding #7: Time constraints limit private special education school leaders and teachers to promote self-care and renewal activities.

Where and when to practice self-care and renewal practices is an issue for leaders and teachers. Repeatedly the participants indicated not being able to find the time as the biggest obstacle they face when it comes to self-care and renewal practices. This is true for themselves as well as their teachers. Although it was more of an issue for their teachers. There are lots of competing and compelling demands as a leader and a teacher. Finding the time to give teachers breaks or implement self-care and renewal practices seems like an impossible task under these circumstances.

Finding #8: Learning the importance of taking care of yourself comes with age.

Many of the leaders shared experiences of when they were younger and did not take care of themselves or that over the years they have recognized the unhealthy habits they were developing because of poor self-care and renewal or they had a health-related incident that opened their eyes to take better care of themselves. Practicing self-care and renewal is not

something that should wait until leaders and teachers are older to practice, but rather it something that should be practiced routinely and proactively.

Summary

This chapter presented all the data collected from the survey and the interview questions for this study from all the participants. The process for coding and analyzing the data were also presented in accordance with the three guiding research questions. Specific themes that emerged and findings were also explored for each of the three guiding research questions.

Guiding research question one sought leaders' perspective on how important self-care and renewal practices are for private special education school leaders. It is determined that the leaders appear to believe it is very important, but they do not report having devoted the necessary time to self-care and renewal practices given their other responsibilities.

Guiding research question two sought to provide insight into the various way private special education school leaders reported they promoted self-care and renewal for themselves and their teachers. From the data, it can be determined that leaders do not report having offered or practiced self-care and renewal activities as part of a routine built into the culture of the school. This data indicates a potential opportunity for leaders to lead by example with regards to their self-care and renewal practices.

The third guiding research questions sought to determine the factors and conditions that inhibit or promote self-care and renewal practices for the private special education school leaders and their teachers. Time emerged as a major factor and condition that leaders face that is often regarded as an obstacle. Also, age plays a role in how the leaders care for themselves. They have learned valuable lessons over the years about taking care of themselves, but self-care and

renewal practices should be continuously practiced always, and not after a revelation or when someone is of a certain age.

The findings for the three guiding research questions are as follows:

Finding #1: Private special education school leaders believe self-care and renewal practices are more important for their teachers than themselves.

Finding #2: The importance of self-care and renewal practices that private special education school leaders expressed does not correlate to the amount of time they spend on self-care and renewal practices for themselves or their teachers.

Finding #3: Private special education school leaders and their teachers would likely benefit from specific, tailored plans developed to address the area of self-care and renewal.

Finding #4: The private special education school leaders should share their self-care and renewal practices with their teachers.

Finding #5: The private special education school leaders should promote self-care and renewal practices in a routine way built into the school culture.

Finding #6: The private special education school leaders could benefit from practicing mindful leadership and reflective practices.

Finding #7: Time constraints limit private special education school leaders and teachers to promote self-care and renewal activities.

Finding #8: Learning the importance of taking care of yourself comes with age.

Many of the concerns and issues that private special education schools are grappling with are those that research has shown self-care and renewal practices can have a great impact on.

However, it must be routinized and built into the daily practice for the leaders and their teachers.

Chapter five includes a summary of the study, a discussion of the findings, implications for future research, and final reflections.

CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, FUTURE RESEARCH, AND FINAL REFLECTIONS

Introduction

Chapter Five is the final chapter of this dissertation, and it is presented in four sections. The first section provides an overview of the research study and a summary of the preceding four chapters. The second section discusses the eight findings from the study according to each of the three guiding research questions combined. This section also describes the potential impact of the findings for private special education school leaders and teachers as well as leaders and teachers in other educational settings, teacher preparation programs, state agencies, educational leadership preparation programs, and policymakers. The third section provides recommendations for future research about self-care and renewal practices for leaders and teachers considering this study. The final section of this chapter is a reflection on this study, my doctoral journey, and a call for action.

Summary of the Study

Chapter One of this dissertation study oriented the reader to the problem of teachers experiencing high levels of stress and leaving the profession at alarming rates. If school leaders make self-care and renewal a priority for themselves and their teachers, their retention rates will increase, morale will improve, and teachers can devote more time to the improvement of student learning (Anderson 2010; Drago-Severson and Blum-DeStefano, 2015; Santoro, 2018). There is a lack of research on self-care and renewal in schools for leaders and teachers. This study was focused on providing insights into the perceptions of private special education school leaders regarding their role in promoting self-care and renewal practices for themselves and their

teachers. It defined the key terms used, described the purpose of the study, and stated the following three guiding research questions that guided this study:

1. Do private special education school leaders consider self-care and renewal practices to be important for themselves and their teachers?
2. What are the various ways private special education school leaders' report they promote self-care and renewal practices for themselves and their teachers?
3. What do private special education school leaders believe to be the factors and conditions that inhibit and foster their efforts to implement self-care and renewal practices for themselves and their teachers?

Chapter Two provided a robust review of the literature which examined the existing literature related to the history of self-care and renewal; benefits of self-care and renewal; approaches to practicing self-care and renewal; the role of leaders in promoting innovation and in particular self-care and renewal practices; factors and conditions that challenge and foster school leaders and teachers in their efforts to practice self-care and renewal in an educational setting; and issues and controversies regarding self-care and renewal and associated practices.

Chapter Three detailed the qualitative, phenomenological, methodology used in this study. This chapter included the rationale for the study, the participant recruitment process, a description of the setting, development of the survey questionnaire and follow-up interview protocol, data collection and analysis methods, delimitations and limitations of the study, the philosophical worldview and role of the researcher and efforts to assure confidentiality and trustworthiness of the study.

Chapter Four presented the data collected for each question from the survey and the follow-up interviews. Data were presented using a variety of visualizations, such as tables and

figures. From an analysis of the data, themes, or categories were identified and translated into eight key findings. The eight findings are as follows: (1) private special education school leaders believe self-care and renewal practices are more important for their teachers than themselves, (2) the importance of self-care and renewal practices that private special education school leaders expressed does not correlate to the amount of time they spend promoting self-care and renewal practices for themselves or their teachers, (3) private special education school leaders and their teachers would likely benefit from specific, tailored plans developed to address the area of self-care and renewal, (4) private special education school leaders should share their self-care and renewal practices with their teachers, (5) private special education school leaders should promote self-care and renewal practices in a routine way built into the school culture, (6) private special education school leaders could benefit from practicing mindful leadership and reflective practices, (7) time constraints limit private special education school leaders and teachers to promote self-care and renewal activities, (8) learning the importance of taking care of yourself comes with age.

The next section includes a discussion of the eight findings, their implications for private special education school leaders and teachers and a connection of the findings of the three guiding research questions to the literature presented in Chapter Two.

Discussion

The literature is clear that teachers in all settings are overburdened and not staying in the field. The situation is causing stress, and job dissatisfaction for teachers and the cost of filling vacancies is placing a financial burden on school districts. The attrition rates of the field of education outpace retirements resulting in an unstable workforce. The well-being of leaders and teachers in schools needs to be addressed to ensure long, healthy, and rewarding careers for

leaders and teachers. When teachers are experiencing the negative consequences often associated with teaching, student achievement is also negatively impacted. Research and recent policies have tended to focus on the well-being of the students, which is also critical, but the well-being of leaders and teachers must be of equal concern.

The private special education schools, where I choose to set this study, is a concentrated microcosm of the education system. These schools are highly specialized and equipped to manage, support, and educate the most challenging students who present with a variety of disabilities and complex needs. The student populations these schools serve plus the fact that the teachers work a longer day and a longer school year for a lower salary than their public school counterparts made them a great example of why they need the additional support that self-care and renewal practices can provide. Private special education schools have some autonomy and flexibility over their programming, therefore if there was greater awareness of the importance of well-being, self-care and renewal practices on the part of the school leaders and teachers and intentional efforts were made to implement these practices, they could become part of a school culture that would benefit teachers, leaders, students, and even parents.

This study provides a pathway for private special education schools so that they may have a better understanding of the benefits of self-care and renewal practices and be more equipped at promoting them proactively. In turn, this could lead to lifestyle changes fostering happier and healthier leaders and teachers in our schools. Furthermore, I hope that this study helps to inform the preparation of future educational leaders and advise best practices for leading and teaching in private special education schools. Leaders must address the working conditions of their schools for themselves and their teachers and create a positive culture where their well-being and the well-being of the teachers is as important as all their other responsibilities. While

collecting data and conducting my interviews, I was struck by how many leaders indicated that they had never received professional development or coursework that encouraged or promoted self-care and renewal for them entering the field. Even as practitioners, many had not participated in dedicated professional development in the area of self-care and renewal for themselves and their teachers. There is a divide between the known benefits of self-care and renewal practices and the professional education arena where these practices are not promoted, and if they are promoted, it is predominantly directed at the students.

While the eight findings of this study are aimed at leaders and teachers in private special education schools, they are applicable to additional staff in private special education schools, leadership and teacher preparation programs, state agencies such as DESE and EEC, professional and trade associations, other school settings such as public schools, charter schools, teacher unions, and students.

The eight findings paint a picture where self-care and renewal practices are viewed as important and valued, but not practiced in a routine way to experience the benefits for leaders, teachers, and students. Self-care and renewal practices can be performed quickly and easily, and special equipment is not necessary (Cook-Cottone, 2015; Garnto, 2018; Jennings, 2018; Kabat-Zinn, 2013). The challenge in practicing is that one must be deft enough with their mind and body to practice self-care and renewal. When one is constantly in a heightened state of stress, one is not thinking clearly and may not be able to access their self-care tools, but a simple breathing exercise or a stretch break can take less than five minutes to practice, but the benefits are immense and long-lasting. Through routine and commitment, taking care of oneself becomes second nature and truly something you cannot imagine living without. My personal experience and the research support the idea that self-care and renewal must be part of a routine that is

accessed proactively and consistently to experience all the known benefits (Cook-Cottone, 2017, Kabat-Zinn, 2013). Finding #2 specifically showed the disconnect between how important leaders feel self-care and renewal practices are for themselves and their teachers, but not a lot of attention, if any, is given to self-care and renewal as part of the school. Making time to practice and promote self-care and renewal in a professional or personal setting can be incredibly challenging, but it is necessary. It is easy and tempting to push self-care and renewal aside until a later time, or when one is feeling better, or after another task is completed, or for a whole host of reasons. Self-care and renewal are not always at the forefront of one's mind. Leaders and teachers are already tasked with finding time to accomplish their ever-growing list of responsibilities but making time for self-care and renewal is vital (Anderson, 2010; Drago-Severson & Blum-DeStefano, 2015). Reprioritizing tasks and building self-care and renewal into the culture could help with the challenge of finding the time (Anderson, 2010; Cook-Cottone, 2015; Jennings, 2018; Shafer, 2018). If something like practicing self-care and renewal is an important enough priority, time will not make a difference, and one will find a way to make it work. Tending to one's health should not be optional regardless of age, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, and profession (Skovholt & Trotter-Mathison, 2016).

As helping professionals, it is easy and comforting to put others before ourselves and our self-care, but this is not a healthy mindset, and it is not sustainable for leaders or teachers in the long-term (Skovholt & Trotter-Mathison, 2016). Often helping professionals like teachers get caught up in serving the other or their students neglecting their own needs in the process. This, in practice, is counterproductive. Truthfully, taking care of our needs first makes us more efficient and better equipped to help others (Cook-Cottone, 2017; Skovholt & Trotter-Mathison, 2016). A cliché example of this notion is when you are flying in an airplane, and the flight attendant

explains the procedure for utilizing the oxygen mask in an emergency. The instructions state to put your mask on first before attempting to help others. This is a great metaphor for self-care and renewal; if your needs are not being met, you cannot assist others. Leaders and teachers must put themselves first. Once they are taking care of themselves, they can better serve others. The students need and deserve leaders and teachers who value their self-care and renewal and who take care of themselves before trying to take care of the students.

Finding #1 revealed that private special education school leaders think self-care and renewal practices are more important for their teachers than themselves. This was not surprising at all to learn this about the leader's perception. Educators tend to put others first by their nature (Skovholt & Trotter-Mathison, 2016). This is consistent with what the literature says about helping professionals, but school leaders and especially those in private special education schools are not immune to the negative consequences often associated with being a leader and a teacher (Ansley et al., 2016; Drago-Severson & Blum-DeStefano, 2015; Santoro, 2018; Wong et al., 2017). It is also reasonable to assume that there could be an element of leaders thinking that they do not need self-care as if it is not something for them to practice, but rather something that others or their teachers need. Given the stressors of the profession, leaders should be more attuned to their own needs and address them accordingly and practice self-care and renewal (Skovholt & Trotter-Mathison, 2016). In a system that does not train teachers and leaders appropriately in self-care and renewal for their profession, it is easy to understand why this is not valued or if it is valued, it is not practiced. It is also possible that leaders lack the knowledge and capacity around self-care and renewal practices to promote them effectively. Some may not be aware of the importance of practicing self-care and renewal, while others may not realize that they should or could promote this for their teachers. Self-care and renewal encompasses a variety

of approaches and activities, and leaders may not know what constitutes self-care and renewal or all the benefits it can bring to a school. Leaders may feel that a one-time professional development offering is all that is needed, or they may think that promoting self-care and renewal for students will inadvertently help the teachers as well. They likely do not grasp the magnitude of self-care and renewal for themselves and their teachers and feel that they do not need to practice self-care and renewal. Also, it could just be uncomfortable for them to open and be vulnerable to needing help. For me, working in a private special education school, I realized I needed to take better care of myself to do the work that was needed. No one told me I should practice self-care or renewal or suggested any techniques. I do recall a leader at the school making a comment that I needed to learn how to “not take it home with me” meaning the work and the stories of the special education students I worked with, but there was no guidance as to how to do that for myself. In essence, that was a message to practice self-care, but it was not clear, and there was no support. Leaders of the school I worked at did not promote self-care and renewal proactively. Had I not recognized this for myself, I would have likely continued down a path that ultimately would have led to burnout.

Leaders should act as a role model and share their self-care and renewal practices with their teachers to help support their efforts of building a culture of well-being (Allen, 2013; Shafer, 2018; Tschannen-Moran & Tschannen-Moran, 2014). Learning that something like deep breathing exercises, gentle stretch breaks, or meditation is benefiting someone by helping them manage stress can be a great motivator and example for one to follow. This is in line with Finding #4, which revealed that private special education school leaders should share their self-care and renewal practices with their teachers. This can help inspire the teachers, but also it can be a bonding experience for leaders and teachers together. This can also help to shape the

culture. If the culture of the school emphasizes and celebrates self-care and renewal, then it will become the norm for that school. Leading by example is a great way to cultivate that standard. There needs to be buy-in from leaders, teachers, and students for a culture to be crafted where self-care and renewal are paramount for them (Davenport, 2018; Shafer, 2018). Self-care and renewal practices cannot be viewed as a burden, mandatory or as a chore.

I found it surprising that not all leaders in this study reported sharing their self-care and renewal approaches with their teachers. I would have speculated that more leaders would be open in sharing their practices for the betterment of their teachers, but I understand the hesitation around sharing this information. For some, this feels like it crosses a boundary of personal and professional discussions, but leaders can lead by example and use their own experiences to help their teachers if they are comfortable sharing. The research on creating a positive school culture supports this as well. This is not to say that leaders need to ask their teachers what they had for breakfast, how often they exercise or how much sleep they got on a given night, but leaders can support the teachers in these areas by simply sharing their practices and providing resources to their teachers on various topics pertaining to self-care and renewal. Additionally, a leader could bring in an outside sleep expert, nutritionist, yoga or fitness instructor to work with the teachers to develop their plans get the teachers started with time for follow-up discussions with the outside professionals.

The data collected for this study in some instances revealed leaders are sometimes in a situation where they missed a cue or misread a teacher's body language. This was referenced multiple times throughout the study. This can be indicative of a leader who needs to take a break, step back, and be more reflective in their practice and someone who may benefit from mindful leadership. This notion led to the discovery of Finding #6, which indicates that private special

education school leaders could benefit from practicing mindful leadership and reflective practices. Self-care and renewal practices allow for someone to achieve this to be more effective through mindfulness, meditation, journaling, or other stress-reducing practices (Anderson, 2010; Drago-Severson & Blum-DeStefano, 2015; Cook-Cottone, 2017; Kabat-Zinn, 2013; Ehrlich, 2017; Wells, 2015). If the school leader is practicing a mindful approach in their leadership, they will be less likely to miss cues, be more adept at working with subtle nuances in behavior, and more quickly recognize warning signs among their teachers with regards to stress and burnout. When one is overwhelmed and overly stressed, it is hard for one to focus and lead with clarity. Self-care and renewal practices allow one to slow down and see more clearly with an open mind.

Typically, in fast-paced environments, tasks tend to be more successfully executed when there is a thoughtful, structured plan in place to address them. Self-care and renewal practices could be included in this approach. Offering sporadic self-care activities or promoting self-care and renewal on an as needed or reactive basis does not allow for those involved to experience the vast benefits of a regular, foundational practice. Finding #3 suggests that private special education school leaders and their teachers would likely benefit from specific, tailored plans developed to address the area of self-care and renewal.

In concert with Finding #3, Finding #5 recommends that private special education school leaders should promote self-care and renewal practices in a routine way built into the school culture. The definition of self-care emphasizes that it is a foundational practice conducted in a routine way that addresses physical, emotional, and mental health (Cook-Cottone, 2017). However, there is no research available on developing a formalized self-care plan in a school setting designed for the teachers. Routine practicing of self-care often requires a commitment and a plan to ensure that it occurs (Cook-Cottone, 2017; Kabat-Zinn, 2013).

In schools, there could be dedicated self-care nooks in classrooms, but also in spaces only accessible to teachers that is a dedicated self-care and renewal space. Many private special education schools have sensory and relaxation rooms for the students they serve, but there could be a space similar for teacher wellness. If a school were to dedicate a space in the school for this purpose, they would need to ensure that no students have access to it and that it is a safe space free from email access, phones ringing and other demands. For a space like this to be successful, these guidelines would need to be respected.

Schedules for teachers should be overhauled to provide time for self-care and renewal practices. It is true that leaders and teachers should also find time to practice self-care and renewal during their non-working personal time and on weekends, but the reality is, they are not doing so effectively. Supporting them during the workday can lead to better habits outside of work. After one begins to experience the benefits of self-care and renewal, one instinctively will want more of it (Cook-Cottone, 2017; Kabat-Zinn, 2013). Therefore, time should be allotted during the school day hours, or immediately before or after school for dedicated self-care and renewal practices. During morning announcements, there could be a daily dedicated, mindful/meditation moment, staff meetings could include a reflection activity, leaders could take the teachers out for lunch or dinner monthly or provide a catered meal for them at school, create a walking club during lunch breaks or before staff meetings, and give teachers enough time to eat their lunch and hydrate. Also, leaders could decorate spaces within the school that promote self-care and renewal such as wellness board with suggestions on practicing self-care and renewal, or inspirational quotes, mantras, and space to write appreciations. There are countless activities that could be implemented as part of a plan to promote self-care and renewal. Making sure teachers feel supported in their work is a key component, and providing thoughtful supervision and

leadership can also promote self-care and renewal. Leaders also need to have an understanding that sometimes teachers will need some flexibility in their work schedule to attend to personal matters. Working with the teachers to assist them in determining their priority tasks and allowing them the autonomy they need to design their lessons can also promote self-care and renewal as well as giving them the time they need to debrief about a situation or even a space to vent healthily. Adequately staffing the school and providing teachers with the necessary resources they need to do their jobs also helps to promote self-care and renewal. It should be noted again that practicing and promoting self-care and renewal can be done for little to no money. All of these suggestions could help foster a culture of self-care and renewal for teachers and leaders. This is also something that will need to be built over time while maintaining and adhering to the all the mandated policies and regulations, however, with some creativity, leaders can learn to promote self-care and renewal and everyone can experience the benefits.

During the data collection phase of this study, I found it surprising that none of the participants reported as having had a structured plan around self-care and renewal. Almost all the respondents described pieces of a plan or an occasional professional development offering, but nothing consistent, routine, and tangible. It was apparent during the data collection process that some leaders devote more time and energy to self-care and renewal than others, but I was anticipating that it would be more formalized.

If self-care and renewal are built into the culture of the school, then it becomes part of the environment and would likely be more easily accepted and welcomed (Allen, 2013; Jennings, 2018; Shafer, 2018). There is a lot of room for flexibility in designing the plans and what leaders want to implement into their cultures. Something that works for one program may not work for another one for a variety of factors. For example, for one school, it might be appropriate to offer

weekly morning yoga class or an after-school fitness class for the teachers while at another school, that might not work for their teachers, but perhaps brief stretch breaks or deep breathing fits better in their model and culture during the day. Leaders need to understand their teachers and their wants and needs to craft their plans accordingly.

Building self-care and renewal into the schedule and developing plans to execute it would also likely alleviate some of the pressure of having to find the time to practice or promote self-care and renewal (Allen, 2013; Anderson, 2010; Rankin, 2017). Respondents reported time as being an obstacle for private special education school leaders as depicted in Finding #7; time constraints limit private special education school leaders and teachers to promote self-care and renewal activities. Through planning and a culture shift, self-care and renewal practices could likely become as commonplace as taking daily attendance in a school setting (Anderson, 2010; Hochbein, 2019). Time is often a barrier to many activities, so it was not surprising to hear from the respondents that time is an obstacle for them as well in promoting self-care and renewal (Hornig, Klasik & Loeb, 2010). School leaders are balancing competing and compelling demands constantly and something like self-care and renewal can get brushed aside especially when it is not part of the culture (Drago-Severson and Blum-DeStefano, 2015; Jennings, 2018).

Many of the respondents reported having learned to take care of themselves as they have aged. This is consistent with Erikson's stages of development for adulthood (Erikson & Erikson, 1997). Some leaders interviewed in this study recalled stories of recognizing signs of burnout, that prompted them to begin taking care of themselves better which led to Finding #8 that learning the importance of taking care of yourself comes with age. Self-care and renewal ideally would be practiced at all stages of life and not something that once a person is older or experiences a life-altering event; they recognize the importance of it. There is no existing

literature correlating the age of the school leader or teacher and how they practice or promote self-care and renewal for themselves or others.

I did not anticipate this Finding #8 of the study, but it is not shocking that age is a factor in how someone views their self-care and renewal. As we age, one tends to be more mindful of their health and mortality and looks for ways to increase one's longevity. As a society, we tend to pride ourselves during our youth on our ability to "pull an all-nighter" or "burn the candle at both ends." While these are clichés, they are a real part of society and our culture, and they are not supportive mindsets of someone who is actively taking care of themselves. There is ample research on adult development and the various life stages which support this view and stresses the dangers of not doing so, but this is even more of a reason that self-care and renewal are important at any age. Leaders, teachers, and students of all ages can benefit from practicing self-care and renewal (Cook-Cottone, 2017; Kabat-Zinn, 2013).

Recommendations for Schools

A school that is committed to addressing the well-being of staff using self-care and renewal will need to evaluate their current practices and determine what will work best for their staff and their structure. Below are key recommendations and information for consideration in promoting self-care and renewal.

School Working Conditions that Support Self-Care and Renewal

To have a workplace environment conducive to self-care and renewal, a few key elements must exist. First and foremost, there needs to be buy-in from the decision-makers and greater awareness for the well-being of the staff. As well as knowledge about the various self-care and renewal practices and the benefits of practicing them routinely. There needs to be an intentional effort to build these practices into the culture of the school and workplace

environment. It is not a secret that working in education is challenging and the benefits of self-care and renewal are proven, therefore through deliberate implementation and commitment of the practices, the well-being of the leaders, teachers, and all staff can be addressed and improved. With self-care and renewal practices, a little can go a long way, and more can be built in overtime once people start experiencing the benefits. Furthermore, the workplace must be a supportive environment where camaraderie is celebrated and encouraged. Time and space must also be dedicated to building relationships among teachers and staff.

School Self-Care and Renewal Plans

Schools must create a self-care and renewal plan for their teachers and staff. Every school will need to determine what works for them and their staff, and it will likely be different depending upon a variety of factors, including the demographics and needs of the staff. Activities must be built into the day or before and after school, but it must be thoughtful, deliberate, and consistent. Schools should plan to start small and add additional activities or adjust once they assess the effectiveness. Schools should also get as creative as their structure can allow to finding time and space for self-care and renewal activities, before school, after school, before meetings, during morning announcements, during breaks, and lunch.

The various activities that can be incorporated into these plans are abundant such as yoga poses, gentle stretches, walking, breathing exercises, mindfulness practices, meditations, gratitude expression, journaling, and more. Additionally, time needs to be devoted to proper nutrition throughout the day and hydration. This time must be protected as well. In other words, teachers cannot get disrupted from their dedicated self-care and renewal time, and others must respect that boundary. In environments like schools, every second tends to be devoted to the work with little to no downtime, but this is not healthy or sustainable.

Additionally, ongoing professional development should be provided on self-care and renewal. Various consultants and professionals can be brought in to work with the staff on developing self-care and renewal plans as well as sharing new approaches. A dedicated space, free from “work” for staff well-being and respite will be ideal if the facility allows. This space could also include other opportunities for deepening self-care and renewal and can be used to foster teacher relationships, celebrate one another and bring everyone together perhaps for a healthy catered lunch or a potluck activity.

Leadership Approaches to Support Self-Care and Renewal in Schools

The leader is responsible for creating the school culture and ideally, a culture that supports self-care and renewal. Leaders should acknowledge that if they are not promoting self-care and renewal, they can become a hindrance in this arena. Teachers need to feel supported and leaders can support them by promoting self-care and renewal. Through mindful leadership, reflective practices, and a clear and articulated vision, a leader can have immense influence over the working conditions and the well-being of the staff. By modeling behavior and leading by example with self-care and renewal, the leader can stress the importance and design of a workplace that supports the staff in their endeavor. Through their development, a leader should learn about the importance and benefits associated with self-care and renewal and make this a priority. Furthermore, leaders need to prioritize tasks and support their staff to do the same. Preferably, leaders will create a space for staff to support one another and provide relevant, meaningful professional development, and additional resources to promote self-care and renewal. This must be done in a thoughtful, proactive, intentional way. Depending upon the size and scope of the school, leaders may need to recruit self-care and renewal lead teachers to help guide the vision and the goal of promoting self-care and renewal.

Recommendations for Future Research

I have put my heart and soul into writing this dissertation and conducting this study, but the truth is, this project is not finished, and there is more work to do. The eight findings of this study and the existing research show us that we need to take better care of ourselves as leaders and our teachers to ensure the success of future generations. Based on the findings of this study, I proposed the following future research studies.

1. The impact of implemented self-care and renewal plans on leaders, teachers, and staff as well as its impact on student achievement and school culture.

A follow-up to this study would be to collaborate with a selection of private special education schools and develop self-care and renewal plans and implement them over time. Data would need to be collected to establish a baseline and then data collected throughout the implementation process and at the conclusion. This would help to examine the effectiveness of the self-care and renewal plan and practices for the leaders, teachers, and staff, and its impact on student achievement and school climate. Ideally, schools of various sizes, resources, and location should be included in the sample.

There is emerging research to directly link teacher self-care to student achievement. Some of this research suggests that student achievement is negatively impacted if the teacher is overly stressed and overwhelmed in their role. I was not able to measure student achievement as part of this study, but it could unveil valuable information as to the importance of teacher self-care in relation to student achievement and help increase the urgency for teacher well-being.

This proposed study would utilize different methods of data collection, such as observations. This proposed study could also be expanded into different school settings such as public schools, charter schools, parochial schools, and more.

2. An examination of gender and age as contributing factors to one's perception of self-care and renewal for leaders and the teachers.

During the data collection process of this study, respondents commented on teachers either being excited or opposed to different self-care offerings, and I found that rather interesting. For example, one private special education school was successful in offering weekly yoga after school where the teachers paid a small fee to participate and another private special education school tried something similar, and it was not successful. In the second school, it was viewed as a burden on their time and not valuable enough for them to want to pay for it themselves. I would like to know more about why it worked in one setting, but not the other.

To further investigate, it would be helpful to study gender and age and how that impacts someone's self-care and renewal approach and philosophy. Perhaps millennials and younger staff are more inclined to pay for and attend a yoga offering at their school, whereas an older employee would not find that appealing or the opposite. I think exploring gender and age as part of self-care and renewal could provide valuable insight and better inform the planning of these activities based on the demographics of the schoolteachers and staff. Additionally, looking at novice versus veteran teachers as part of this proposed study could lead to further insight into their perceptions of self-care and renewal.

3. The perceptions of school leaders regarding their role in promoting self-care and renewal practices for all staff and teachers of different grade levels inside and outside of Massachusetts.

This study focused on private special education school leaders and their teachers, but it would be helpful to conduct this study with leaders, teachers, and staff from other education

settings and be able to compare the data. It would be interesting to see if the results are similar when studying public schools or a charter school.

The private special education schools, for example, typically have a staff consisting of school counselors, social workers, clinicians, nurses, Board Certified Behavior Analysts, residential staff, facilitates staff, childcare workers, overnight staff, administrative support, paraprofessionals, and more. Addressing the self-care of everyone who is part of the school community would be ideal, and this proposed study could look at all those staff members as a follow-up to this study.

Furthermore, this proposed study could look at elementary, middle, and high school teachers and evaluate their current self-care and renewal practices to determine if perhaps different levels of teaching view self-care and renewal differently. It could be that different grade levels are inherently more inclined to promote self-care and renewal practices as opposed to other grade levels. It would be helpful to cross-examine the different subsections of teachers and evaluate their self-care and renewal practices, such as elementary school compared to high school or middle school to see if there is a difference in their approaches to self-care and renewal.

This study was conducted with the **maaps** member private special education schools. This proposed study could be to conduct this study with schools outside of Massachusetts. It would be interesting to compare the results to those in this study and analyze how leaders in different states promote self-care and renewal practices.

4. An exploration of the perceptions of superintendents and key decisionmakers regarding their role in promoting self-care and renewal practices.

This study recruited participants from various leadership positions within private special education schools, but it did not focus solely on those leaders who are the key decision-makers. While some key decisionmakers participated, there were instances during the data collection where leaders expressed wanting to do more with self-care and renewal practices for their teachers, but they were restricted by a lack of “buy-in” from the primary decisionmakers. By studying the superintendents and key decisionmakers in other school settings in this proposed study, insight could be gained as to why they choose to promote or not promote self-care and renewal and what information and support they need in order to promote self-care and renewal.

5. The impact of recent school shooting tragedies and regular active shooter drills in schools on the well-being of the teachers and leaders.

While conducting my research, I was surprised not to find any articles that explored teacher stress and its correlation to school violence and active shooter drills. The profession of teaching was stressful before these incidents were frequently occurring in our country. Now with regular active shooter drills, and discussions about teachers being armed, the stress is only going to increase. It is reasonable to hypothesize that these recent tragedies and discussions have negatively impacted teacher and leader well-being and are likely contributing to the rising attrition rates and increased stress impacting education. This proposed study could examine schools where tragedies have occurred and investigate the impact they have had on the school community and the well-being of the teachers and leaders as well as look at a school where there are regular drills or where there have been threats and measure the impact from before the incident and after. This proposed study could include a narrative or case study as a method of data collection.

6. The perception of teachers regarding their role in promoting and practicing self-care and renewal.

Similar to the study conducted for this dissertation could be considered from the teacher perspective. This study was conducted from the perspective of leaders and their perception of their role in promoting self-care and renewal for themselves and their teachers. By examining the perception of the teachers, it could help round out this study and help to determine what is needed to help teachers manage their stress and take better care of themselves.

7. An examination of current student self-care and renewal practices in schools and the expansion of those practices to benefit teachers.

A study could be conducted where the current self-care and renewal practices are evaluated as a starting point, and recommendations could be developed to expand upon and deepen those practices for maximum effectiveness. During the data collection for this study, different schools reported pieces of a formal self-care plan, but no one reported having a concrete plan, but there are practices in use for students. By reviewing what schools are currently doing in this area for students, could help inform practices for leaders, teachers, and other staff.

8. The perceptions of higher education teacher preparation programs and leaders of educational leadership programs regarding their role in preparing future teachers and leaders in the area of self-care and renewal.

This proposed study would examine higher education programs tasked with preparing teachers and leaders to evaluate how they are preparing leaders and teachers to manage stress and take care of themselves in their roles and promote self-care and renewal. It would be interesting to see if some programs are incorporating strategies and what information is being shared during coursework or practicum requirements. There is research to suggest that teacher

preparation programs are not realistically and accurately preparing teachers for the profession, which is resulting in them leaving the field of education within five years.

Final Reflections

This doctoral journey has opened my eyes and my heart to the needs of leaders and teachers in all settings, and it deepened my understanding of the challenges associated with leading and teaching. The coursework, the doctoral committee, discussions with my cohort members and colleagues, the benchmarking papers have all contributed to the strong foundation for which I was able to conduct this study. Reflecting on my personal experiences that have brought me to this point and researching the world of self-care and renewal have truly shown me the magnitude of its importance. I have tremendous respect and empathy to leaders and teachers in all school settings, and their well-being can no longer be ignored.

The time is now. Our teachers are suffering and leaving the field. Education is critical to the evolution of humankind. It is said that children are our most precious resource, and they are being undermined by a system that does not provide for the well-being of its teachers. These professionals are on the frontlines day after day cultivating our children for the future, and we need to ensure their health and well-being is being addressed. We cannot ignore this issue any longer. Classrooms should not be compared to Emergency Rooms because of how stressful they are. That is not a healthy environment for anyone to be subjected to, especially for a school. Our students deserve better, as do our teachers. This is the sad reality of today. If the attrition rates continue to rise and new candidates are not entering the field, and teachers are burning out, what are we going to do? The answer could be within the realm of self-care and renewal. Many other employers have recognized that employees achieve more when they are taken care of emotionally, mentally, and physically. Lots of big businesses have flourishing wellness programs

and have reimagined the workspace to be more suitable for one's well-being. Schools have yet to tackle this issue across the board for their teachers and leaders, but we must. There are proven benefits to self-care and renewal practices, and they should be promoted for everyone in all educational settings. We need to take a step back and stop piling responsibilities and mandates onto our teachers and evaluate our current practices to figure out a way to be better for our teachers and our students. They deserve the best.

I believe that the private special education school leaders, teachers, and staff are true superheroes. The work they do has inspired me more than they know. From my time as the Guidance Coordinator in a private special education school to working for the trade association, **maaps**, these schools have set the stage for my professional career. Regardless of where my path leads, I will always carry with me their stories and the immense privilege it was to study and work beside such phenomenal educators. To think my dissertation study could play a small part in helping them in the future is an honor. By using this study as a springboard, private special education schools could begin to adopt self-care and renewal practices into the culture of their schools and experience the benefits. It would not take much to see the results, but it would take a conscious, consistent effort on the part of leaders to ensure these practices were being built into the culture and regularly promoted for themselves and their teachers.

I have been reduced to tears, and humbled listening to leaders of private special education schools recount stories of extreme circumstances where families fought for their child's educational needs against unthinkable odds. I have witnessed tremendous resilience and grace from students who have overcome obstacles to large for most to comprehend, and I have seen the heartache and range of emotions that can accompany this work. I have heard their struggles loud

and clear. Their struggles around retention, resources, facilities, motivation, chronic stress, morale, job satisfaction, unintended consequences of regulatory oversight, burnout, and more.

I wish for them to be well and to be able to continue the important work they do for the students who need them. It is my sincere hope that private special education school leaders can flourish and continue to take care of themselves and create new ways for their teachers to practice better self-care and renewal.

Leaders, teachers, and policymakers in all settings should be implementing self-care and renewal wellness programs within schools and experiencing the benefits for themselves and students. Self-care and renewal should be part of a school curriculum for students. Through these practices' schools will become stronger communities with a positive culture. A fraction of schools across the country have begun implementing mindfulness, yoga, and social-emotional learning components, but this needs to be expanded to more school districts nationwide. However, these programs must also be inclusive of all school staff. For the preparation of future teachers and leaders, self-care and renewal should be built into the professional standards for the profession and fostered at the preparation phase to ensure teachers and leaders are properly prepared and equipped for their roles. Schools have changed over the years and consequently so has the role of leaders and teachers. Self-care and renewal must be a priority. The sustainability of teachers, leaders, and the quality of education depends on it.

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Appendix A
Invitation and Consent to Participate in Survey

Dear Colleague,

I am a doctoral student at Lesley University studying the perceptions of private special education school leaders in their role of promoting self-care and renewal practices for themselves and their teachers. I understand how busy you are, but your input is critical to this research study.

If you consent to be a participant, this survey should take about 20 minutes to complete. In addition, if you give additional permission, you may be contacted for a 30-45 minute follow-up interview which will be scheduled at your convenience in-person or by phone.

If you permit to participate, you are free to decide to withdraw your participation at any time. There is no risk involved in your participation, and I will be the only person with access to the data. I will not use your name or any identifying information in any of my records or dissertation. A pseudonym will be used for your responses to the interview questions. At the end of the survey, you will be asked to indicate your willingness to participate in a follow-up interview.

The findings from this research will be published in my dissertation. If you are interested in obtaining a copy of the summative report of the findings, please check the box at the end of the survey and provide your email address.

If you have questions about the project or your participation, please email me at tmelito@maaps.org or call me at 781-909-5309.

If you wish to contact Dr. Stephen Gould, my senior advisor, you may do so via email at sgould2@lesley.edu or by phone at 617-349-8665.

There is a Standing Committee for Human Subjects in Research at Lesley University to which complaints or problems concerning any research project may, and should, be reported if they arise. Contact the Committee Chairpersons at irb@lesley.edu

Click here to consent to participate and access the survey.

Sincerely,
Theresa Melito-Conners
Ph.D. candidate Educational Leadership

Appendix B Online Survey

For the purposes of this survey, the terms self-care and renewal practices are defined as follows:

Self-Care Practices: “Self-care is defined as the daily process of being aware of and attending to one’s basic physiological and emotional needs including the shaping of one’s daily routine, relationships, and environment as needed to promote self-care” (Cook-Cottone, 2017, p. 297).

Renewal Practices: The verb renew is defined as to make like new again or restore freshness. John Goodlad was the first to coin the term educational renewal which pertains to teachers continuously adapting to change, monitoring their effectiveness, and adjusting when necessary to their practice (Goodlad, J., Mantle-Bromley & Goodlad, S., 2004).

Please answer the following questions:

1. What is your position at your school?
2. Do you consider self-care and renewal practices to be important to your well-being?
Very Important Somewhat Important Minimally Important Not Important
3. Do you consider self-care and renewal practices to be important to the well-being of your teachers?
Very Important Somewhat Important Minimally Important Not Important
4. What percentage of time day do you devote to self-care and renewal practices for yourself each day? 0 is none, and 100% is all.
0 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%
5. What percentage of time do you devote to promoting self-care and renewal practices for your teachers each day? 0 is none, and 100% is all.
0 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%
6. How would you rate the morale of your teachers on a typical day?
Very high Somewhat High Somewhat Low Very Low
7. How often do your teachers express concerns regarding their self-care and renewal?
Almost Always Often Rarely Never
8. What changes to your job would help you **promote** self-care and renewal practices for your teachers?
9. On a scale of 1-4 (1=None; 2=Little; 3=Some; 4=Most), please rate the following:

- I address self-care and renewal practices whenever I have an opportunity to communicate with teachers.

Importance of Behavior to You

1 2 3 4

Frequency of Implementation

1 2 3 4

Effectiveness in Doing So

1 2 3 4

Impact of Behavior

1 2 3 4

- I serve as a role model for self-care and renewal practices for my teachers.

Importance of Behavior to You

1 2 3 4

Frequency of Implementation

1 2 3 4

Effectiveness in Doing So

1 2 3 4

Impact of Behavior

1 2 3 4

- I reflect or practice meditation.

Importance of Behavior to You

1 2 3 4

Frequency of Implementation

1 2 3 4

Effectiveness in Doing So

1 2 3 4

Impact of Behavior

1 2 3 4

- I encourage my teachers to reflect or practice meditation.

Importance of Behavior to You

1 2 3 4

Frequency of Implementation

1 2 3 4

Effectiveness in Doing So

1 2 3 4

Impact of Behavior

1 2 3 4

- I practice gentle yoga and stretching.

Importance of Behavior to You

1 2 3 4

Frequency of Implementation

1 2 3 4

Effectiveness in Doing So

1 2 3 4

Impact of Behavior

1 2 3 4

- I encourage my teachers to practice gentle yoga and stretching.

Importance of Behavior to You

1 2 3 4

Frequency of Implementation

1 2 3 4

Effectiveness in Doing So

1 2 3 4

Impact of Behavior

1 2 3 4

- I notice a difference in the well-being of my teachers when I promote self-care and renewal practices.

Importance of Behavior to You

1 2 3 4

Frequency of Implementation

1 2 3 4

Effectiveness in Doing So

1 2 3 4

Impact of Behavior

1 2 3 4

- I take time to eat and hydrate during the day.

Importance of Behavior to You

1 2 3 4

Frequency of Implementation

1 2 3 4

Effectiveness in Doing So

1 2 3 4

Impact of Behavior

1 2 3 4

- I provide a schedule where my teachers have time to eat and hydrate during the day.

Importance of Behavior to You

1 2 3 4

Frequency of Implementation

1 2 3 4

Effectiveness in Doing So

1 2 3 4

Impact of Behavior

1 2 3 4

- I get up from my desk and walk around the school building during the day.
Importance of Behavior to You
1 2 3 4
Frequency of Implementation
1 2 3 4
Effectiveness in Doing So
1 2 3 4
Impact of Behavior
1 2 3 4

- I provide space for my teachers to take a break and walk around the school building during the day.
Importance of Behavior to You
1 2 3 4
Frequency of Implementation
1 2 3 4
Effectiveness in Doing So
1 2 3 4
Impact of Behavior
1 2 3 4

- I exercise at least three times a week for at least 30 minutes.
Importance of Behavior to You
1 2 3 4
Frequency of Implementation
1 2 3 4
Effectiveness in Doing So
1 2 3 4
Impact of Behavior
1 2 3 4

- I encourage my teachers to exercise at least three times a week for at least 30 minutes.
Importance of Behavior to You
1 2 3 4
Frequency of Implementation
1 2 3 4
Effectiveness in Doing So
1 2 3 4
Impact of Behavior
1 2 3 4

- I participate in relaxing hobbies such as knitting, cooking, crafting, etc.
Importance of Behavior to You
1 2 3 4
Frequency of Implementation
1 2 3 4

Effectiveness in Doing So

1 2 3 4

Impact of Behavior

1 2 3 4

- I promote relaxing hobbies for my teachers such as knitting, cooking, crafting, etc.

Importance of Behavior to You

1 2 3 4

Frequency of Implementation

1 2 3 4

Effectiveness in Doing So

1 2 3 4

Impact of Behavior

1 2 3 4

- I practice breathing exercises to calm down and de-stress.

Importance of Behavior to You

1 2 3 4

Frequency of Implementation

1 2 3 4

Effectiveness in Doing So

1 2 3 4

Impact of Behavior

1 2 3 4

- I encourage my teachers to use various breathing exercise to de-stress.

Importance of Behavior to You

1 2 3 4

Frequency of Implementation

1 2 3 4

Effectiveness in Doing So

1 2 3 4

Impact of Behavior

1 2 3 4

- I am constantly trying to learn new approaches to self-care and renewal for myself.

Importance of Behavior to You

1 2 3 4

Frequency of Implementation

1 2 3 4

Effectiveness in Doing So

1 2 3 4

Impact of Behavior

1 2 3 4

- I am constantly trying to learn new approaches to self-care and renewal for my teachers.

Importance of Behavior to You

1 2 3 4

Frequency of Implementation

1 2 3 4

Effectiveness in Doing So

1 2 3 4

Impact of Behavior

1 2 3 4

- I practice being present in the moment while calmly acknowledging one's feelings without judgment (mindfulness).

Importance of Behavior to You

1 2 3 4

Frequency of Implementation

1 2 3 4

Effectiveness in Doing So

1 2 3 4

Impact of Behavior

1 2 3 4

- I support my teachers being present in the moment while calmly acknowledging one's feelings without judgment (mindfulness).

Importance of Behavior to You

1 2 3 4

Frequency of Implementation

1 2 3 4

Effectiveness in Doing So

1 2 3 4

Impact of Behavior

1 2 3 4

- I get the recommended amount of 7-9 hours of sleep daily, and I rest when needed.

Importance of Behavior to You

1 2 3 4

Frequency of Implementation

1 2 3 4

Effectiveness in Doing So

1 2 3 4

Impact of Behavior

1 2 3 4

- I encourage my teachers to get the recommended amount of 7-9 hours of sleep daily and rest when they need to do so.

Importance of Behavior to You

1 2 3 4

Frequency of Implementation

1 2 3 4

Effectiveness in Doing So

1 2 3 4

Impact of Behavior

1 2 3 4

- I take time to “unplug” away from email and devices regularly outside of the school day.

Importance of Behavior to You

1 2 3 4

Frequency of Implementation

1 2 3 4

Effectiveness in Doing So

1 2 3 4

Impact of Behavior

1 2 3 4

- I encourage my teachers to “unplug” and take time away from email and devices outside of the school day.

Importance of Behavior to You

1 2 3 4

Frequency of Implementation

1 2 3 4

Effectiveness in Doing So

1 2 3 4

Impact of Behavior

1 2 3 4

- I do not expect my teachers to work after hours or on weekends.

Importance of Behavior to You

1 2 3 4

Frequency of Implementation

1 2 3 4

Effectiveness in Doing So

1 2 3 4

Impact of Behavior

1 2 3 4

- I encourage my teachers to collaborate and support each other, and I provide time for them to do so.

Importance of Behavior to You

1 2 3 4

Frequency of Implementation

1 2 3 4

Effectiveness in Doing So

1 2 3 4

Impact of Behavior

1 2 3 4

- I continuously adapt to change, monitor my effectiveness, and adjust when necessary as a leader.

Importance of Behavior to You

1 2 3 4

Frequency of Implementation

1 2 3 4

Effectiveness in Doing So

1 2 3 4

Impact of Behavior

1 2 3 4

- I encourage and support my teachers to adapt to change, monitor their effectiveness, and adjust when necessary.

Importance of Behavior to You

1 2 3 4

Frequency of Implementation

1 2 3 4

Effectiveness in Doing So

1 2 3 4

Impact of Behavior

1 2 3 4

- I am conscious of my body and attend to health issues in a timely matter.

Importance of Behavior to You

1 2 3 4

Frequency of Implementation

1 2 3 4

Effectiveness in Doing So

1 2 3 4

Impact of Behavior

1 2 3 4

- I work hard not to contribute to the stress of others.

Importance of Behavior to You

1 2 3 4

Frequency of Implementation

1 2 3 4

Effectiveness in Doing So

1 2 3 4

Impact of Behavior

1 2 3 4

- I provide safe and healthy working conditions for my teachers.

Importance of Behavior to You

1 2 3 4

Frequency of Implementation

1 2 3 4

Effectiveness in Doing So

1 2 3 4

Impact of Behavior

1 2 3 4

- I help my teachers find meaning and inspiration in their work.

Importance of Behavior to You

1 2 3 4

Frequency of Implementation

1 2 3 4

Effectiveness in Doing So

1 2 3 4

Impact of Behavior

1 2 3 4

- I feel excited as I arrive at work every day.

Importance of Behavior to You

1 2 3 4

Frequency of Implementation

1 2 3 4

Effectiveness in Doing So

1 2 3 4

Impact of Behavior

1 2 3 4

- I support and enjoy camaraderie with my teachers.

Importance of Behavior to You

1 2 3 4

Frequency of Implementation

1 2 3 4

Effectiveness in Doing So

1 2 3 4

Impact of Behavior

1 2 3 4

- I encourage minimal healthy venting, but I actively discourage negative talk and toxic thinking among my teachers.

Importance of Behavior to You

1 2 3 4

Frequency of Implementation

1 2 3 4

Effectiveness in Doing So

1 2 3 4

Impact of Behavior

1 2 3 4

- I make certain that my teachers are supported by their colleagues and are not isolated.

Importance of Behavior to You

1 2 3 4

Frequency of Implementation

1 2 3 4

Effectiveness in Doing So

1 2 3 4

Impact of Behavior

1 2 3 4

10. What aspects of your job **inhibit** you from promoting self-care and renewal practices for your teachers?
11. In your opinion, please rank the following teacher **working conditions** by how they impact a teacher's well-being and job satisfaction. Rank Order 1 – most important, 7 – least important
- Non-Teaching Time during the work day
 - Facilities and Resources
 - Student Behavior and Discipline
 - Professional Development
 - School Leadership
 - Colleague Support and Strong Mentorship
 - Safe Environment
12. On a scale of 1-4 (1=Not an Issue; 2=Minor Issue; 3=Somewhat of an issue; 4=Major issue), please rate the following for the teachers at your school:
- Chronic Stress**
- 1 2 3 4
- Compassion fatigue**
- 1 2 3 4
- Teacher absenteeism**
- 1 2 3 4
- Novice teacher isolation**
- 1 2 3 4
- Lack of knowledge around self-care and renewal practices**
- 1 2 3 4
- Risk of burnout**
- 1 2 3 4
- Demoralization**
- 1 2 3 4
- Lack of self-awareness for the teacher**
- 1 2 3 4

Not properly prepared for the reality of being a teacher

1 2 3 4

Please enter your email address below if you wish to receive a summative report of the findings from this study.

Email: _____

Thank you for completing the study. I will be selecting 6-8 participants for a follow-up interview. Please indicate if you would be willing to be interviewed by checking the box below and providing your phone # and email address.

I am willing to participate in a follow-up interview: Yes_____ No_____

Contact phone #:

Contact email (if you did not already enter it above):

Appendix C Interview Consent Form

Dear Colleague,

Thank you for consenting to participate in a follow-up interview regarding the perceptions of private special education school leaders in your role of promoting self-care and renewal practices for yourself and your teachers. Leaders perceptions are very important to this study and your participation is greatly appreciated. The interview should last approximately 30-45 minutes.

Pseudonyms will be used, and all identifiers will be removed. All hard copies of data will be stored in a locked file cabinet which is only accessible to the researcher. Electronic files will be stored on a password protected laptop accessible only to the researcher. Any identifying details will be kept confidential by the researcher. Data collected will be codes and the participant's identity will never be revealed by the researcher and only the researcher will have access to the data collected. There is no risk in participating in their study.

To capture responses from participants accurately and completely, the researcher will record the audio from the face-to-face interviews and telephone conversations.

If you decide to participate in the interview, please sign at the bottom of this form. You are free to withdraw your consent at any time without any penalty or negative consequence.

The findings from the research will be published in my dissertation. If you are interested in obtaining a summative report of the findings, please check the box below and a copy of the results will be emailed to you at the conclusion of the study.

If you have questions about the project or your participation, please email me at tmelito@maaps.org or call me at 781-909-5309.

If you wish to contact Dr. Stephen Gould, my senior advisor, you may do so via email at sgould2@lesley.edu or by phone at 617-349-8665.

☐ I wish to receive a summative report of the findings of this study at the following email address (please provide your email _____).

I, _____ (please print name) have read and understand the above information. My consent to participate in this interview has been given of my own free will. I will receive a copy of this consent form.

Signature

Date

There is a Standing Committee for Human Subjects in Research at Lesley University to which complaints or problems concerning any research project may, and should, be reported if they arise. Contact the Committee Chairpersons at irb@lesley.edu.

Appendix D

Interview Protocol

“Thank you for consenting to participate in the follow-up interview regarding your perception of your role in promoting self-care and renewal practices for yourself and your teachers. Your experience and insight are critical to this research study. I anticipate the interview lasting between 30-45 minutes. I want to confirm that the decision to take part in this research study is completely voluntary and that you also agree to be recorded during the interview. The recording will be transcribed and checked for accuracy. Neither your name nor any other information that specifically identifies you will be associated with the recording or the transcript or used in any presentations or written products resulting from the study. All recordings and documents associated with this study will only be accessible to the researcher. The data will be kept on a secure laptop and flash drive. Pseudonyms and aliases will be used in the written work for the purposes of the study. Should you wish to discontinue the interview you may do so at any time.”

[Organizing question for the researcher: Do private special education school leaders consider self-care and renewal practices to be important for themselves and their teachers?] for interviewer only

1. Please describe as many of the benefits of self-care and renewal practices that you can think of.
2. Please describe any negative aspects of self-care and renewal.
3. What is the process you use to determine areas to focus on regarding self-care and renewal for yourself?
4. What is the process you use to determine areas to focus on regarding self-care and renewal for your teachers?
5. Describe the professional development experiences you have had that you feel are useful in helping you use self-care and renewal practices for yourself?
6. Describe the professional development experiences you have had that you feel are useful in helping you promote self-care and renewal practices for your teachers?

[Organizing question for the researcher: What are the various ways private special education school leaders' report they promote self-care and renewal practices for themselves and their teachers?] for interviewer only

7. What does a typical day look like for you with regards to self-care and renewal practices from the time you wake up until you go to bed?
8. Describe the various ways you promote self-care and renewal practices for your teachers?

9. Of the various ways you promote self-care and renewal practices for your teachers, please describe the ones you feel are the most effective and least effective and why.
10. Describe two or three satisfying experiences in which you felt most effective in helping teachers utilize self-care and renewal practices.
11. Describe two or three least satisfying experiences in which you did not feel you were as effective as you would have liked to have been in helping teachers utilize self-care and renewal practices.

[Organizing question for the researcher: What do private special education school leaders believe to be the factors and conditions that inhibit and foster their efforts to implement self-care and renewal practices for themselves and their teachers?] for interviewer only

12. What factors or conditions inhibit you from promoting self-care and renewal practices for yourself?
13. What factors or conditions would help you to promote self-care and renewal practices for yourself?
14. What kinds of supports would you need as a leader to promote self-care and renewal practices for yourself and your teachers?
15. What changes should be made to your current workload so that you might become more effective at helping teachers utilize self-care and renewal practices?
16. What is the most powerful lesson that you have learned regarding self-care and renewal practices you would like to share?
17. Describe a specific incident and how self-care and renewal practices impacted you as a leader.

“Thank you for consenting to participate in the study. I truly appreciate you taking the time to share your experiences with me.” for interviewer only