

# Reframing Teacher Engagement: A Framework for Improving Workplace Conditions to Foster Teacher Engagement

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*Historically, the factors contributing to teacher engagement have been premised on the idea that engagement is grounded in intrinsic motivation and intrapersonal characteristics. This narrative literature review offers an alternative perspective, whereby teacher engagement is enhanced through creating policies to improve workplace conditions and foster engagement. Within the findings, three essential conditions to foster teacher engagement were identified: a supportive organization, active leadership, and healthy interpersonal relationships. A conceptual framework based on these findings is constructed and proposed as an aid to school leaders in policy development to improve teacher engagement.*

*Historiquement, les facteurs contribuant à l'engagement des enseignants ont été basés sur l'idée que l'engagement est fondé sur la motivation intrinsèque et les caractéristiques intrapersonnelles. Cette analyse documentaire narrative propose une autre perspective, selon laquelle l'engagement des enseignants est renforcé par la création de politiques visant à améliorer les conditions de travail et à favoriser l'engagement. Dans les conclusions, trois conditions essentielles pour favoriser l'engagement des enseignants ont été identifiées : une organisation de soutien, un leadership actif et des relations interpersonnelles saines. On construit un cadre conceptuel basé sur ces résultats et on le propose au leadership scolaire comme appui au développement de politiques visant à améliorer l'engagement des enseignants.*

Numerous researchers have documented that maintaining and increasing teacher engagement is an important contemporary issue for modern schools, as engaged teachers are better able to engage students and sufficiently meet their learning needs (Bakker & Bal, 2010; Mérida-López et al., 2017; Roth et al., 2007). Effective teaching is dependent on motivated teachers who are cognitively, emotionally, and socially invested in their work (Klassen et al., 2013). School leaders have a direct impact on the working environment within schools (Leithwood et al., 2010, as cited in Reid, 2014). School leaders are best situated to have the greatest impact on teacher engagement through school policy development and day-to-day leadership actions. It is challenging for school leaders to positively impact engagement among their teaching staff. The focus of this theoretical paper is on developing an understanding of the conditions that foster teacher engagement and the construction of a broad conceptual framework for school leaders to employ as a means of increasing engagement in their specific contexts.

For the purpose of this study, we utilized Hakanen et al.'s (2006) definition of teacher engagement. This is described as teachers being dedicated to their work, possessing feelings of

vigour or high levels of energy to put toward developing their practice, in addition to absorption or the feeling of being actively engaged. By identifying and examining the conditions that positively impact teacher engagement, our primary objective is to construct a framework that provides a series of policy-driven actions for school leaders concerning how school policies should be altered or strengthened to promote optimal conditions for teacher engagement. Emerging from this understanding and objective, the research question, “What conditions are necessary for teachers to be engaged in their work as educators?” was constructed and used to guide our inquiry for this paper.

Through our literature review it became apparent that historically, teacher engagement has been a well-researched topic. However, the existing body of research indicates a strong influence of intrinsic factors on teacher engagement, such as personality characteristics, self-efficacy (Averill & Major, 2020; Bermejo-Toro et al., 2016; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2019; Sokmen & Kilic, 2019); teachers’ enthusiasm for their work (Stirling, 2014; Wenstrom et al., 2018); fulfilment resulting from working with students (Stirling, 2014); as well as the desire to make a positive impact on the learning and lives of their students (Finnigan & Gross, 2007; Parr et al., 2021). Although these perspectives are valid, they fail to examine conditions that foster and maintain intrinsic factors and attitudes amongst teachers. Teacher engagement is not solely the result of teachers’ intrinsic characteristics. In contrast, when examining studies on employee engagement in sectors outside of education, it is clear employers utilise a range of strategies to alter and improve organizational conditions that are known to increase employee engagement and do not solely rely on intrinsic factors and attitudes (Al Mehrzi & Singh, 2016; Parkes & Langford, 2008; Saks, 2006; Singh, 2016). Drawing on this body of literature, school leaders should be provided with a framework to influence policy with an aim to positively impact teachers’ working conditions.

Through our investigation, this study identifies three themes fostering teacher engagement, including a supportive organization, active leadership, and healthy interpersonal relationships. This article begins with an exploration of the current context of teacher engagement, strategies school leaders utilize to support engagement, and our perspective on teacher engagement. We then delve into positioning ourselves in relation to our research and discuss the employed methodology. Following this, we share the findings of our research through a conceptual framework for increasing teacher engagement and offer practical recommendations for school leaders. Finally, the discussion section of the paper examines the conceptual framework in greater detail, explores limitations of our study, and offers suggestions for future research.

### **Contemporary Context**

It can be noted that specific research on the conditions that promote teacher engagement is limited. Alternatively, a significant amount of research has been conducted on the effects of negative teacher engagement, primarily through examining burnout and attrition amongst education professionals. When teachers experience burnout, they often disengage from their work, register increased absenteeism, and obtain a less satisfactory level of job performance (Acton & Glasgow, 2015). Therefore, students benefit when teachers are fully engaged in and more enthusiastic about their work (Baker et al., 2000; Bakker & Bal, 2010; Mérida-López et al., 2017; Roth et al., 2007).

During our initial review of the literature, it became evident many of the articles concerning teacher engagement focus on the intrapersonal characteristics of a teacher, such as personality

characteristics, beliefs, and coping strategies that foster engagement in their work. For the purposes of this article, these characteristics are described as intrinsic factors influencing teacher engagement. This body of research suggests one of the main motivating factors for teachers is working directly with students (Stirling, 2014) as well as a desire to make a positive impact on the learning and lives of their students (Finnigan & Gross, 2007; Parr et al., 2021). Furthermore, teachers' enthusiasm for their work and the subject matter they teach appear to positively correlate with engagement (Stirling, 2014; Wenstrom et al., 2018). Self-efficacy emerged several times throughout the literature as an interpersonal factor contributing to teacher engagement (Averill & Major, 2020; Bermejo-Toro et al., 2016; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2019; Sokmen & Kilic., 2019). Self-efficacy can be described as a teacher's belief in their abilities as a professional to organize and execute actions that lead to a positive result (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2019). Although this literature demonstrates the strong influence of intrinsic factors on teacher engagement, this perspective neglects to examine conditions that foster and maintain these intrinsic factors and attitudes among teachers. Recognizing this failure of existing research to focus on fostering engagement, our article aims to fill this gap in the literature.

Research pertaining to employee engagement within organizations outside of education is less focused on intrapersonal characteristics. In contrast, there appears to be a greater focus on organizational conditions fostering engagement. For example, Singh's (2016) study of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation factors influencing employee engagement found that autonomy, recognition, money, and a culture of respect, trust, and rapport had a positive impact on employee motivation. Furthermore, Parkes and Langford (2008) identified several factors that are conducive to employee engagement, such as opportunities for career development, employees' belief in the mission and values of the organization, and the degree of innovation within an organization. As teachers are paid employees, it is obvious educational leaders can learn from and develop engagement strategies based on employee engagement research outside of educational contexts. Therefore, these sources were included within our research strategy and will be explored in greater detail in the findings section of the article.

Educators face a variety of job pressures and organizational challenges that impact their work engagement (Acton & Glasgow, 2015; Kutsyuruba et al., 2016; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2019; Wong et al., 2017). As a response to these pressures, much of the current educational research focuses on examining wellness strategies and teachers' intrapersonal characteristics that assist them in coping with difficult working conditions (Brasfield et al., 2019; Iancu et al., 2018; Lever et al., 2017; Parker et al., 2012; Prilleltensky et al., 2016). The fault with this strategy is it primarily places the onus on teachers to develop coping strategies for managing their occupational stress and engagement, without intentionally cultivating the workplace conditions that promote teacher engagement. Secondly, the high rates of teacher attrition experienced globally demonstrate that wellness and coping strategies fall short as teachers continue to disengage from their work (Kalimo & Hakanen, 2000 as cited in Hakanen et al., 2006; Kutsyuruba et al., 2016; Newberry & Allsop, 2017).

As an alternative, we propose it is prudent to undertake a novel approach to increase teacher engagement that focuses on examining the organizational conditions fostering teacher engagement. To gain a broader understanding of how schools can become more engaging workplaces, it is necessary to examine strategies other employment sectors use to foster engagement. This will allow school leaders to determine where they can make improvements based on engagement research utilised in other sectors. By examining organizational conditions that promote teacher engagement, the need for teachers to mitigate their job-related stress

through intrapersonal characteristics and coping strategies will be reduced. This has the potential to advance schools to become more sustainable and engaging workplaces.

### **Author Positionality**

Our identities as practicing teachers, leaders, and researchers have provided us with a unique perspective of the complexities of leadership and conditions that impact teacher engagement. Our desire to understand the complexities associated with school leaders' ability to foster teacher engagement is reflected by the notion of *multiple truths*. Simply stated, multiple truths refers to the idea that individuals provided with the same evidence may draw different conclusions based on their unique lived experience. This is further expanded by conceptions of social constructivism, ascertaining knowledge and values which are not objective, but arise from social interactions within context (Alexakos, 2015; Baert et al., 2014). Furthermore, interpretivism, as described by Mathison (2005) suggests "the study of social phenomena requires an understanding of the social worlds that people inhabit" (p. 210). We do not attempt to remove ourselves from the process of data analysis, instead, we acknowledge our identities as practicing educators within Alberta's K-12 context and welcome this lens in our analysis of the literature and development of the conceptual framework. As you consider the findings shared in this study, we welcome you to apply your unique lens, analysing and reflecting on the findings in relation to your unique context.

### **Methodology**

To conduct our research, we adopted the narrative literature review process as described by Waterfield (2018). This process has a clear focus yet allows the researcher to flexibly investigate related questions pertaining to a selected problem of practice. Waterfield (2018) proposes a seven-step structure for conducting a literature review that dictates formulating a research question, identifying key concepts, choosing a search strategy, conducting a computerized search, performing a supplementary search, undertaking a critical analysis and synthesis of the literature in relation to key concepts, and finally formulating conclusions and recommendations. This framework appealed to us as a way to conduct a more robust literature review, adding structure and credibility to the study's findings, while allowing current research to be expanded upon by other researchers.

After finalizing our research question, we developed a search strategy that encompassed a range of keywords relevant to our research question. A preliminary list of inclusion and exclusion criteria was developed. This incorporated literature published within the last twenty years, in addition to a variety of quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods peer-reviewed journal articles that identified at least one workplace condition positively correlated with workplace engagement. Research conducted within educational and non-educational contexts was included in this study. The search strategy and preliminary criteria for inclusion and exclusion were applied to identify relevant literature for review using the ERIC, Google Scholar, APA PsychINFO, and Academic Search Complete databases, resulting in 64 articles. The criteria for inclusion and exclusion were further refined for clarity in order to ensure articles presented data that allowed us to answer our research questions. Based on this refinement, 33 articles were included for review.

Aligning our work with the tenets of Grounded Theory (Denzin, 2007; Gall, et al., 2015), we began to work with the data by leveraging the constant comparison method of data analysis to

code and organize data according to emerging themes (Lewis-Beck et al., 2011). Working collaboratively, each data sample was reviewed and compared to the previously reviewed sample. We engaged in an iterative process of reviewing, comparing, and grouping similar data samples resulting in the emergence of primary and secondary themes.

It is prudent to note two key modifications made during the process of data analysis. Firstly, data samples reflecting intrapersonal conditions resulting in teacher engagement were removed. This decision was made owing to the fact that our research examines the conditions necessary for teachers to be engaged in their work as educators, directing attention toward policy-driven leadership action within the organization. Secondly, primary and secondary themes were refined as the complexity of leadership and organizational factors became apparent during the process of data analysis.

## Findings

This study endeavoured to identify the conditions necessary for teachers to actively engage in their work as educators. The findings presented in this section suggest three essential conditions necessary for teachers to feel engaged, comprising the following: A Supportive Organization, Active Leadership, and Healthy Interpersonal Relationships. Figure 1 graphically represents our conceptual framework of conditions necessary for teacher engagement.

### Supportive Organization

The presence of a Supportive Organization consistently emerged throughout the literature. This primary theme embodies five contributing factors, including Alignment with Mission and Values, Organizational Support, Procedural Fairness, Opportunities for Career Growth, and Opportunities for Innovation.

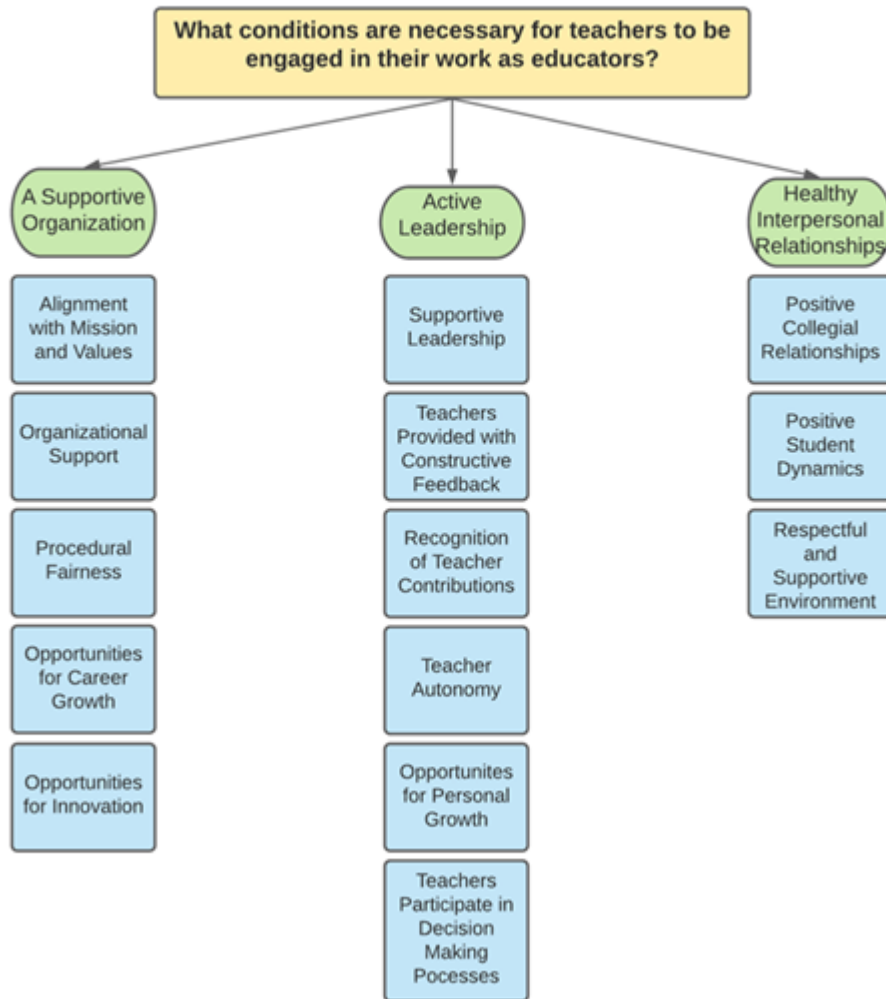
Alignment with Mission and Values is understood as the presence of a connection between teachers' personal values and the organizations' mission and values. Daniels (2016) as well as Parkes and Langford (2008) found a positive correlation between teachers' beliefs in the organizational mission and values with their engagement and achievement of organizational objectives. Additionally, *value consonance* is a contributing factor in teacher motivation, which can be described as teachers feeling they share prevailing values and ethical norms with their school (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2016, 2018).

Organizational Support can be described as teachers' perception of feeling supported by the organization. Gülbahar (2017) and Saks (2006) identified organizational support and trust as resulting in greater levels of work engagement. Elements of organizational culture such as support for instruction, discipline, engagement of parents, and support of students' socioemotional well-being are noted to determine teachers' performance and behaviour (Daniel et al. 2019; Viseu et al., 2016). Further evidence of this condition is provided by McMillan et al., (2016) who claimed company policy, or school expectations and ethos, are strongly related to teacher engagement in continuing professional development.

Procedural Fairness is teachers' sense of equity with regard to the treatment they receive from leaders within the organization (e.g., career advancement, disciplinary action, teacher evaluation etc.). In their work, Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2018) as well as Saks (2006) found teachers' perceptions of fairness and procedural justice result in greater engagement. Börü (2018) determined that fairness and communication skills exhibited by school leaders positively affect

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework of Conditions Necessary for Teacher Engagement



teacher motivation. Furthermore, Gobena (2020) claimed various policy systems in teaching-learning processes impact teacher engagement when they are clearly communicated by the administration, accompanied by an accountability system, and are perceived as fair and transparent by teachers.

Opportunities for Career Growth refers to opportunities for teachers to advance their careers within the organization. Parkes and Langford (2008) found the presence of career opportunities highly correlated with levels of engagement. Furthermore, inadequate career structures serve as demotivating factors for teachers (Ushioda, 2011 as cited in Han et al., 2016). Gobena (2020) identified school administrative policy systems in teacher-learning processes as statistically significant in relation to teachers' career development opportunities. Finally, leadership development is found to positively influence teacher motivation (According to Packard & Dereshiwsky, 1990 as cited in Han et al., 2016).

Opportunities for Innovation can be described as teachers' feeling they have opportunities and support to address challenging work in innovative ways. Börü (2018) found education policies

that support teacher and student creativity increase motivation among teachers. Parkes and Langford (2008) claimed the degree of innovation in the workplace is found to strongly correlate with engagement. Additionally, job characteristics such as opportunities to engage in challenging or meaningful tasks, use innovative skills, and utilize personal discretion, result in greater job engagement (Saks, 2006; Singh, 2016).

### **Active Leadership**

Active Leadership can be defined by six distinct components, inclusive of Supportive Leadership, Teachers Provided with Constructive Feedback, Recognition of Teacher Contributions, Teacher Autonomy, Opportunities for Personal Growth, and Teachers Participation in Decision Making Processes. Active Leadership consistently emerged as a condition necessary for teachers to be engaged.

Supportive Leadership refers to the need for teachers to feel supported by their leadership team. Leadership styles such as instructional, transformational, and authentic leadership positively impact dimensions of teacher engagement (Dou et al., 2017; Kulophas et al., 2018). Additionally, teacher engagement is positively associated with specific leadership behaviours and effective leadership support (Latta, 2020; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2016; Viseu et al., 2016; Xu & Thomas, 2011).

Teachers Provided with Constructive Feedback suggests there must be opportunities for teachers to receive supportive and constructive feedback to improve their practice. Han et al. (2016) named teacher evaluation as a factor influencing teacher engagement. Providing teachers with supportive feedback connected to their professional development goals is found to positively impact teacher engagement (Viseu et al., 2016; Xu & Thomas, 2011).

Recognition of Teacher Contributions relays the significance of leaders initiating opportunities for teachers to feel recognized for their contributions. Recognition, particularly social recognition, is known to affect levels of engagement in teachers (Fernet et al., 2016; Guglielmi et al., 2016; Parkes & Langford, 2008; Singh, 2016).

Teacher Autonomy can be understood as opportunities for teachers to act with independence in their day-to-day work and includes exercising a sense of self-direction (Singh, 2016). Instructional practice that supports teacher autonomy is identified as a significant factor in educators' initiating and maintaining innovative teaching practices as well as serving as a consistent predictor of teachers' motivation (Averill & Major, 2020; Parr et al., 2021).

Opportunities for Personal Growth affirms the need for teachers to have access to opportunities that develop their professional practice. Guglielmi et al. (2016), as well as Han et al. (2016), suggested that teacher development opportunities are notable factors in teacher engagement. Furthermore, opportunities for growth building on teachers' existing knowledge and skills positively impact teacher engagement (Ford et al., 2019; Kumar et al., 2020).

The theme, Teachers Participate in Decision-Making Processes, provides insight into the necessity of leaders inviting teachers to participate meaningfully in decisions affecting their work. Opportunities for teachers to make meaningful contributions during decision-making processes increase motivation, commitment, and job engagement (Bakker et al., 2003; Parkes & Langford, 2008; Saks, 2006). Additionally, Gultekin and Acar (2014) as well as Han et al. (2016) report making pedagogical decisions that include determining how subject matter is taught via curricular decisions, selection of teaching materials, classroom organization and discipline impact teacher engagement.

## Healthy Interpersonal Relationships

The presence of Healthy Interpersonal Relationships surfaced as a primary condition necessary for teachers to be better engaged in their work as educators and is characterized by Positive Collegial Relationships, Positive Student Dynamics, in addition to a Respectful and Supportive Environment.

Positive Collegial Relationships are understood to be the interpersonal relationships among teachers and leaders. Several studies indicate cooperation and supportive interpersonal relationships are strong predictors of teacher motivation, engagement in professional learning, and the development of innovative practices (Averill & Major, 2020; Fernet et al., 2016; Han et al., 2016; McMillan et al., 2016; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2018; Viseu et al., 2016). Börü (2018) as well as Gultekin and Acar (2014) supported this claim, suggesting collegial attitudes and behaviours contribute to a shared sense of unity, cooperation, and synergy in the school environment. This is found to have a positive effect on a teacher's occupation and motivation.

Positive Student Dynamics is understood as the behavioural norms, attitudes, and engagement in learning tasks among the student population. Latta (2020) described the attitude and behaviour of students or student culture as a factor predicting dedication among staff. Additionally, student engagement in learning tasks and/or activities is found to determine teacher motivation (Börü, 2018; Han et al., 2016).

The presence of a Respectful and Supportive Environment is characterized by clear communication, trust, respect, and support. Engaging environments feature relationships that are described as supportive, positive, trusting, enabling, encouraging, inspiring, and respectful (Ford et al., 2019; Gultekin & Acar, 2014; Singh, 2016; Song et al., 2013). Parkes and Langford (2008) found in addition to a supportive environment, leaders' competence and ability to communicate effectively impacts employee engagement. Furthermore, a collective culture or set of norms shared by teachers and administrators reduces conflict and increases teachers' self-concept (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2018).

## Significance for Policy

The focus of this section is to identify policy-driven leadership actions for school leaders to improve teacher engagement within their local contexts. The policy recommendations are organized under each of our three main themes into immediate, short-term, and long-term actions. Readers' will note many of the more immediate actions have less cost associated with them and are more straightforward to implement in comparison to the long-term actions. Additionally, immediate actions are typically actions that do not require an official policy change and can be implemented by educational leaders at their own discretion. In contrast, long-term actions may require the adoption of specific policies and frameworks.

Although the leadership policy actions are presented utilizing this framework, they should not be considered a linear progression of steps. Moreover, many of these policies are reflected within various professional standard documents already in place in many jurisdictions within Canada, including the *Leadership Quality Standard* (Alberta Education, 2020a), *Provincial Leadership Development Framework* (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2017) as well as the Saskatchewan League of Educational Administrators, Directors, and Superintendents *Dimensions of Leadership* (in *LEADS Leadership Development Paper*, 2017). Where appropriate, we have provided examples of connections between our suggested policies and how they are



reflected within these leadership standards. Leaders wishing to adopt these policies will need to conduct a needs assessment or environmental scan to determine which policy actions are most appropriate and responsive to issues within their specific context.

## **Supportive Organization**

### ***Immediate Actions***

One action organizations need to undertake is ensuring teachers develop relationships, feel connected, and have access to the senior leadership team within the school authority (i.e., the school district). Within one's organization, consider whether teachers feel comfortable sharing the challenges they are facing and are confident their perspectives and knowledge will be taken into account by senior leaders when making decisions. For example, in Alberta, the *Superintendent Leadership Quality Standard* (Alberta Education, 2020b) requires senior leaders to establish constructive relationships and collaborate with teachers.

A further immediate policy action for school authority leaders is ensuring the processes for accessing resources to support students, such as consultants, behaviour therapists, and/or speech-language pathologists, are transparent, logical, and timely. In cases where there are a limited number of resources in comparison to student needs, the triage system leaders utilize to decide which students and teachers will receive support must be fair, transparent, and logical. This policy is reflected within Alberta Education's (2020a) *Leadership Quality Standard*, which requires leaders to facilitate access to resources that enhance student learning and development.

### ***Short-Term Actions***

To foster conditions for a supportive organization there needs to be alignment between teachers' personal values with the organization's mission and values. Therefore, an ongoing, short-term action is to provide opportunities for teachers to dissect and critique the organization's mission and value statements. This will allow teachers to understand and appreciate how the mission and values of the organization translate into practice and their personal role in fulfilling organizational goals. Furthermore, it is imperative teachers are provided with meaningful opportunities to engage in the process of creating and revising mission and value statements to ensure they are of continued relevance. This connects with the Saskatchewan League of Educational Administrators, Directors, and Superintendents (2017) dimensions of professional leadership where leaders are required to construct written vision statements for the future of their districts and articulate this vision clearly to members of their organization.

### ***Long-Term Actions***

Teacher engagement is fostered when teachers have opportunities for career growth and advancement. Leaders need to develop clear, transparent, and fair policies for staffing decisions both at the school and system levels. Wherever possible, if a teacher indicates interest in an open position and they are not the successful applicant, they need to be provided with meaningful, actionable feedback, which they can utilize to further develop their skills and become a stronger candidate in the future. This is true for both promotions (e.g., teacher to an instructional coach) and lateral movements (e.g., grade four teacher to a high school teacher).

It is necessary for school and system-level leaders to have disciplinary and evaluative policies, as well as processes in place to identify and remedy unsatisfactory performance among teaching staff. However, in the majority of cases, the goal of these policies is to develop and improve teacher performance. Thus, it is necessary to maintain positive engagement among teachers during and following the final stage of the disciplinary process. To foster engagement, teacher disciplinary policies must be clear and consistent. In this, teachers need to feel that their leaders are supporting their growth while being provided with fair critiques and actionable feedback.

## **Active Leadership**

### ***Immediate Actions***

Specific policy actions need to be taken by leaders to ensure the necessary conditions are present for teachers to be fully engaged in their work. One such policy action for the school and school authority leaders is the collaborative design and implementation of peer coaching and mentorship structures for teachers to support one another. Peer coaching and mentorship serve diverse purposes, including supporting teachers who have transitioned to a new school, supporting teachers who are new to the profession, facilitating ongoing individual reflection, and providing growth-oriented feedback for teachers to improve practice in various areas of their day-to-day work. Alberta Education's (2020a) *Leadership Quality Standard* and Alberta Education's (2020b) *Superintendent Leadership Quality Standard* recognize peer coaching and mentorship structures as an effective means of supporting teachers.

A variety of school-level decisions impact teachers' work. These decisions include grade or class configurations, supervision schedules, planning for whole school events, establishing playground or supervision "rules", and determining formats for parent-teacher conferences. Alberta Education's (2020a) *Leadership Quality Standard* suggests leaders consult and collaborate with teachers to make decisions through open dialogue, therefore understanding multiple perspectives. When leaders consistently create opportunities for teachers to provide input on decisions that impact their work, it results in a sense of shared ownership and teachers are more likely to feel engaged.

Consistent, fair, and predictable local processes employed by leaders to identify and resolve conflicts amongst students, parents, and staff effectively are imperative to establish conditions fostering teacher engagement. This immediate policy action is articulated in both Alberta Education's (2020a) *Leadership Quality Standard* and British Columbia Ministry of Education's (2017) *Provincial Leadership Development Framework*. It is pertinent to note that school leaders must clearly communicate their process for resolving conflict with teachers before the emergence of conflict. Increased clarity around the process of conflict resolution maintains integrity, develops trust, and strengthens interpersonal relationships—a condition fostering teacher engagement.

### ***Short-Term Actions***

The responsible and effective management of financial resources is shared by various levels of leadership within the educational system. Budget procedures need to align with organizational goals and priorities need to be clear, transparent, and involve teachers in providing feedback (Alberta Education, 2020a). Involving teachers in the budget process can aid in fostering

conditions for teacher engagement. Here, consultation with teachers by school leaders, in conjunction with the school authority, provides invaluable perspective to inform the planning of the budgetary process.

A school calendar that facilitates opportunities for meaningful professional learning for teachers represents a short-term policy action that is supported by both the *Superintendent Leadership Quality Standard (2020b)* and the *Leadership Quality Standard (2020a)* in Alberta. At the school authority level, a consistent set of criteria aligned with provincial policy guides the development of a calendar that is responsive to the local context. School leaders must then effectively utilize the time allotted within the calendar to develop a professional learning structure meeting the professional development needs of their teaching staff. Structures such as Professional Learning Communities or Communities of Practice allow teachers to experience a sense of autonomy, building upon their existing knowledge and skills. When this occurs, workplace conditions that foster teacher engagement can be established.

### ***Long-Term Actions***

Opportunities for Personal Growth was identified as an area fostering teacher engagement in our review of the literature. As previously stated, policies to guide the professional growth, supervision, and evaluation process are established and clearly communicated by the school authority and school leaders. In addition to providing clarity to the teacher evaluation process, school leaders can leverage the content of these policies to improve teachers' instructional practice and develop their capacity to respond effectively to the learning needs of all students (Alberta Education, 2020a). The British Columbia Ministry of Education's (2017) *Provincial Leadership Development Framework*, describes leaders facilitating conversations with teachers. This encourages ownership of professional growth goals and identifying the relationship of personal goals within the context of the organization's goals and priorities. Implementation of this long-term policy action requires ongoing collaboration with teachers to support their unique aspirations. During regular, routine classroom observations teachers and leaders engage in coaching conversations to determine the observation's focus, so the feedback provided supports teacher growth toward their professional learning goals.

### **Healthy Interpersonal Relationships**

#### ***Immediate Actions***

Clear communication policies at both the school and system levels are necessary to promote teacher engagement. In addition to ensuring relevant information is communicated to staff, it is pertinent for communication policies to outline appropriate methods of communication, such as in-person or electronic reporting, depending on the type of information being shared. Furthermore, when decisions are made that impact teacher practice and job demands, communication concerning how both school and system-level decisions were made and why alternative actions were not considered is essential. Finally, policies regarding communication norms and practices for engaging with students and parents need to be clearly articulated. When developing these policies, leaders must consider how frequently they expect teachers to communicate with parents and/or students. Here, times of the day they will and will not be available to respond to emails, and when it is appropriate to send an email versus verbal

conversation are important considerations. Similar policies are found within the British Columbia Ministry of Education's (2017) *Provincial Leadership Development Framework*, which require leaders to develop communication policies to work with a range of stakeholders within the school community.

A second immediate action for school leaders is to ensure they develop an informal policy to equally and equitably recognize teachers' contributions to the learning environment and school culture. Whether a teacher goes above and beyond by coaching a sports team, planning a school-wide activity, leading a professional development session, or participating in a committee, it is imperative to recognize their contributions. This policy action connects to the British Columbia Ministry of Education's (2017) *Provincial Leadership Development Framework*, which requires leaders to recognize and celebrate collective and individual achievements and accomplishments.

### ***Short-Term Actions***

To cultivate conditions that foster healthy relationships between teachers and students, several different policy actions should be taken. Clearly written policies to support positive student behaviour must be developed and regularly reviewed. Furthermore, it is necessary to engage teachers in the development of these policies to ensure they have a voice in defining behavioural expectations for students and feel their pedagogical beliefs regarding behaviour support align with these policies. Secondly, policies to support the inclusion of students with diverse needs must be established. Leaders need to consider how diverse learners will be supported in the classroom and how they will support teachers who are struggling with students with exceptionalities. This includes how students and teachers will be provided with funding and support from the district and provincial levels to support inclusion. A final policy action is to ensure that the student voice is taken into consideration when making decisions at the school and system levels. To promote the student voice, leaders may consider forming principal's advisory committees and student leadership groups, and inviting students to take part in leadership meetings. These short-term policy recommendations connect with the Alberta Education's (2020a) *Leadership Quality Standard*, which requires leaders to foster opportunities for students to share their opinions to inform school leadership and decisions. This can assist in creating an inclusive learning environment, which develops a shared responsibility for student success.

### ***Long-Term Actions***

Positive relationships between students and teachers are necessary for fostering conditions that promote teacher engagement. However, when students' physical, social, and emotional needs are not met, they have difficulty engaging in learning, which impacts their relationships with teachers. Therefore, a critical challenge for the school, school authority, and ministry leaders is to collaboratively develop policies to support the physical, social, and emotional needs of students. All too often, teachers are left on their own to support and manage students with a variety of needs with limited time and resources. Rather than putting the onus on the teacher to solve these significant challenges, educational leaders need to advocate for appropriate resources to support the most vulnerable students. This will have a dual effect of improving student outcomes and fostering teacher engagement.

## **Policy Action Shortcomings**

There are several shortcomings of the policy actions requiring exploration prior to implementing the framework. Firstly, many of the policy actions explored are time consuming to implement, both for school leaders and teachers. Time is a valuable commodity within education. School leaders and teachers have limited hours in their workday and new initiatives are often viewed by teachers as additional workload pressures. To illustrate, taking time as a staff to dissect and critique the organisation's mission and value statements may be viewed as a distraction from teaching tasks, such as grading and material preparation. Furthermore, gathering teacher input, whether through in person discussions or online surveys, is time consuming, particularly when teachers are frequently asked for input. One potential solution to these issues is to allow participation to be voluntary. A problematic issue with the voluntary participation approach is the data will not include perspectives of all teachers. Perhaps certain staff members are unable to stay late after school to take part in conversations with the school leadership team for a variety of reasons, such as lack of childcare or other commitments. Therefore, their input will not be available when school leaders make decisions. It is necessary to utilise teachers' assignable time when implementing the framework recommendations to ensure the initiatives do not create additional workload pressures.

There are funding constraints within all educational systems and it is not possible to fully fund all the programs and services one would desire within a school. Engaging teachers in discussion regarding how to utilise limited funding will increase teacher engagement. However, it is necessary to recognize there are often competing interests between what different stakeholders view as the most beneficial for the school community. Therefore, school leaders need to make decisions in the best interests of students and the school, even if these decisions are not popular amongst all stakeholders.

As a school leader, it is necessary to ensure that one is as open and transparent as possible when communicating decisions to staff. Transparency ensures teachers understand leaders' decisions and how their individual perspectives were taken into consideration during the process. There are times when it is difficult for school leaders to be completely transparent with staff. To illustrate, when making decisions regarding staff deployments, leaders may have two or more teachers who are seeking the same role. As teachers often work in teams, it may be necessary for school leaders to consider the different individuals within their school when forming teams to avoid personality conflicts. The rationale for staffing decisions may not be appropriate to share with the teachers impacted. In these circumstances, it is the hope that by being transparent and clearly communicating the rationale for decisions most of the time, the staff will trust that the leader weighed all considerations appropriately when making their decision.

Finally, the success of engagement initiatives at the school level is dependent on teachers' valuing the initiative, feeling a connection to the organization, and authentically buying-in throughout the process. When implementing the framework recommendations, one must be mindful of teacher perception and the impact of leadership actions and make adjustments throughout the process to ensure teachers value the work.

## **Discussion**

### **Conditions Fostering Teacher Engagement Framework**

Our framework for fostering conditions necessary for teacher engagement is not designed with a linear process in mind. The cultivation of these conditions requires an iterative process involving leaders gathering information about the current state of each condition within their organization. Subsequently, it is essential to undertake leadership actions to maintain or improve each condition. For example, when examining a condition such as Opportunities for Career Growth, leaders need to constantly reflect on their awareness of teachers' career goals. School leaders can action this by considering how they can support teachers in reaching their goals. This can be assisted by recognizing that career goals evolve over time, and by making teachers aware of career opportunities within their school and school authority. It is particularly important that these conditions are in place to support the engagement of new teachers when they join the organization. Ultimately, although focusing on multiple conditions may appear burdensome, it is imperative to recognize many of these conditions overlap. In this, by placing focus on leadership actions within one condition, the results will impact multiple conditions.

While conducting our literature review, we were unable to locate a pre-existing conceptual framework for fostering conditions conducive to teacher engagement. The framework created through our research is likely the first conceptual framework specifically aimed at examining the workplace conditions that foster engagement among educators. However, frameworks for employee engagement generalizable to multiple sectors have been previously proposed, which encompass structural similarities to our framework (Al Mehrzi & Singh, 2016; Sahoo & Mishra, 2012). For example, Al Mehrzi and Singh's (2016) conceptual employee engagement framework identified organization culture, leadership, perceived organizational support, and teamwork as key drivers of employee engagement. These themes directly relate to our conditions of supportive organization, active leadership, and healthy interpersonal relationships. Furthermore, Sahoo and Mishra (2012) outlined ten key drivers of employee engagement. The following six key drivers directly connect to our conditions: career development (opportunities for career growth), empowerment (opportunities for innovation, teacher autonomy, opportunities for personal growth), equal opportunities and fair treatment (procedural fairness, opportunities for career growth), performance appraisal (procedural fairness), and co-operation (positive collegial relationships). Although research on teacher engagement frameworks is limited, teachers are also employees of their organization and therefore are motivated by conditions similar to employees across other sectors. Therefore, the comparison of our framework of conditions that foster teacher engagement to other employee engagement frameworks can be noted as justified and valuable.

### **Limitations**

A narrative literature review, as described by Waterfield (2018) provides scholars with a structured approach to conducting research. The application of grounded theory and the constant comparison method of data analysis further strengthens this research design. Nevertheless, there are notable limitations associated with how our research study was conducted.

A narrative literature review requires researchers to interpret existing literature to create meaning. When using an interpretive approach, researchers need to have a keen sense of awareness regarding their own beliefs, values, social positions, and background in relation to their

research question and research process (Byrne, 2017). From an interpretivist perspective, conceptions of absolute truth are illusive. Instead, it is understood that knowledge and values arise from social interactions within a particular context (Alexakos, 2015; Baert et al., 2014). In response to this limitation, data was interpreted in its original context, was believed to be factual, was representative of diverse perspectives, and credit was provided to the original source of the research (Machi & McEvoy, 2016). Furthermore, we leveraged our individual researcher identities, situated within Alberta's K-12 context, to engage in reflexive dialectic exchanges to bring awareness to, and challenge assumptions. A limitation of this perspective is our findings are premised on a subjective interpretation of data.

A second limitation worth noting is the stringent exclusion criteria of the current study. Our research design focused solely on including peer-reviewed journal articles. Hence, literature such as theses, dissertations, and book chapters were excluded from our analysis.

Finally, the proposed conceptual framework is theoretically grounded and further study will be required to determine its impact on teacher engagement.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Our framework for improving workplace conditions to foster teacher engagement is purely conceptual and reflects a universal approach to fostering teacher engagement. Disaggregating teacher engagement and examining the concept through various demographic categories is an area that constitutes further research. This work will empower school leaders to apply the current framework responsively, acknowledging their staff population, and reflecting a greater understanding of the unique demographic differences among staff.

To move our proposed framework beyond the conceptual level, diagnostic tools need to be developed to collect data that gauge levels of teacher engagement and how these levels are impacted by altering workplace conditions. Additionally, it will be beneficial for future researchers to undertake studies on conditions promoting teacher engagement through the perspective that teacher engagement is not solely dependent on teachers' intrinsic characteristics but is directly impacted by organizational policy and leadership actions.

The scope of this study is directed to providing recommendations for school leaders to improve teacher engagement. Although falling outside the purview of the current framework, maintaining standard of living emerged as a condition contributing to teacher engagement. Maintaining standard of living is further understood as monetary compensation and is characterized by compensation reflecting teachers' expertise and their contributions to society. Financial benefits, such as salary, pension, and health insurance, serve as extrinsic factors affecting teacher motivation when the compensation provided allows for a sufficient quality of life (Gobena, 2020; Han et al., 2016; Singh, 2016). According to teachers, compensation that adequately reflects workload and responsibility is necessary and results in an increased feeling of respect (Daniel et al., 2019; Gultekin et al., 2014). Future research is required to evaluate the significance of monetary compensation as a workplace condition fostering teacher engagement.

### **Conclusion**

Maintaining and improving teacher engagement is an important contemporary issue for educational leaders as engaged teachers are better situated to meet the learning needs of their students. However, historically, research on teacher engagement focused largely on intrinsic

factors impacting teacher engagement such as self-efficacy, love of their subject matter, and wanting to make a positive impact in students' lives. This perspective of teacher engagement suggests the onus of engagement rests with teachers themselves. This can lead to neglect in terms of examining organizational conditions that foster and maintain these intrinsic factors and attitudes amongst teachers. In response to identifying this limitation, this study sought to create a framework of organizational conditions promoting teacher engagement.

Drawing on literature from around the globe, in both the educational and corporate contexts, this study found that school leaders are issued opportunities to influence policy in a manner that positively impacts teacher engagement. Through the findings three essential workplace conditions that increase engagement were identified, including a Supportive Organization, Active Leadership, and Healthy Interpersonal Relationships. Consistent and sustainable policies in addition to day-to-day leadership actions by school leaders have the potential to establish workplace conditions that foster and maintain teacher engagement. In order to determine the efficacy of the conditions proposed in the framework, rigorous practical testing and evaluation will be required. Nevertheless, the conceptual framework proposed in this study is an important tool for educational leaders to establish workplace conditions fostering teacher engagement.

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