Addressing Teacher Retention within the First Three to Five Years of Employment

By Paticia Cells[*], Lou L. Sabina[±], Deb Touchton[°],
Rajni Shankar-Brown[•] & Kiara L. Sabina[⧫]

Teachers' perceptions of long-term career success are largely related to the levels of support they receive early on in their careers. This study on teacher retention and the factors that influence teacher choice to remain in the field after the first five years of employment, examined three schools of varying demographics and socioeconomic status in a large public school district in Central Florida. Participants interviewed were in the first three to five years of their teaching career. Information derived from each interview was used to determine trends and factors that influence teacher retention and attrition. The main finding was that when teachers feel supported through professional development, time for collaboration with colleagues, and autonomy, they are more likely to remain in the teaching profession.

Keywords: teacher retention, elementary schools, teacher recruitment, principal leadership, organizational systems in schools

Introduction

A common trend in schools within is teacher attrition. Teachers often leave the field within their first three to five years in the field due to increasing demands, lack of support and professional development, and unrealistic expectations from their principals. This contributes to a constant cycle of recruiting and hiring teachers on a yearly basis, which creates an additional stressor for school administrators at both the building and district level. Examining specific reasons why teachers leave and why teachers stay may reduce the need for the constant recruitment and retention of teachers locally, regionally, nationally, and internationally.

The purpose of this study was to investigate teacher retention within a large public school district and develop a clear understanding of actions needed to support teacher retention in the field. Additionally, the study serves as a resource to public school districts in planning for support of teachers within their first 3-5

[*]Principal of Eagle Creek Elementary School, Orange County Public Schools & Ed.S. Student, Stetson University, USA.
[±]Assistant Professor and Associate Co-Chair for Graduate Education Studies, Stetson University, USA.
[°]Professor, Stetson University, USA.
[•]Professor and Jessie Ball duPont Endowed Chair of Social Justice Education, Stetson University, USA.
[⧫]Academic Success Coordinator, Seminole State College of Florida, USA.

years in the classroom. Currently in the state of Florida, there is a high need for teachers across all subject areas, grade levels, and disciplines.

This research study explored ways in which the school district and its school-based administrators can increase teacher retention within their schools. Qualitative methodology was used to conduct interviews among ten participants and was based on the grounded theory framework. This data derived from the interviews was used to determine trends in participant responses. Each of the interviews was conducted in the participant's school classroom setting and were recorded and transcribed to determine emerging trends. After interviews concluded, data transcription was coded to determine trends in participant responses. Data was organized to determine themes that emerged from responses. Trend data was analyzed and used to determine trends in responses to overarching research questions.

Data were collected using researcher-formulated questions to evaluate three main aspects of school culture: (1) professional collaboration, (2) affiliative collegiality, and (3) self-determination/efficacy. Additional questions were incorporated into the instrumentation that targeted specific matters in reference to teacher retention. Lastly, anecdotal records from teacher interviews were used to determine trends related to teacher retention. Each of the interviews was coded and analyzed, and the data was sorted and organized to determine trends among participant responses. Common trends among each group of participants were analyzed to determine themes. The themes were then related back to applicable literature to support further investigation into the topic of teacher retention within the first three to five years in the field. Data collected among three different public elementary schools in Central Florida produced similar trends despite the varying demographics and socioeconomics of each elementary school.

Research Questions

1. What factors influence teacher retention in the field of education within the first 3-5 years of employment?
2. How can districts plan to support teachers beyond their third year in the field?
3. How does principal leadership, mentoring programs, and professional development play a role in teacher retention?

Literature Review

Teacher preparation programs heavily influence whether or not teachers will remain in the field beyond the first five years. Retaining teachers in the long-term benefits districts greatly by minimizing financial losses associated with teacher training (Watlington, Shockley, Guglilmino, & Felsher, 2010; Loeb & Miller, 2006; Zhang & Neller, 2016). Based in the literature, between 40% and 50% of teachers will leave the field prior to completing their fifth year (Zhang & Neller,

2016). Avoiding these financial burdens and supporting teachers with retention beyond the first five years connects back to the district supports which are normally provided to teachers early on in their careers. Districts across the globe are promoting distributive leadership practices as a means to retain teachers and enhance effective pedagogy. School improvement efforts that connect to the implementation of distributive leadership practices are showing promising results in connection with teacher retention (Ross, Lutfi, & Hope, 2016; Sulit & Davidson, 2020; Torrance, 2013).

Distributed and Shared Leadership

Shared leadership practices have shown to promote much success among retaining and growing highly effective teachers. Schools that implement a shared leadership approach with teachers have shown to increase student achievement as well as increase outcomes of teacher retention (Urick, 2020). The distributive leadership model promotes teacher autonomy and a level of capacity that motivates teachers through deliberate planning for principals to share leadership with teachers (Sulit & Davidson, 2020). The research has shown that distributive leadership may help to mitigate teacher attrition rates and save districts money on hiring (Sulit & Davidson, 2020). Based on interviews with teachers, Sulit and Davidson (2020) found that distributive leadership practices helped to increase a sense of connectedness among teachers and their colleagues. Distributive leadership creates a sense of endless possibilities for ensuring an organizational balance and flow between instructional staff and administration and confirm the notion that no single individual can effectively lead in the absence of collaboration. In today's most productive school environments, a distributive leadership model has shown great success through identifying teacher leaders and promotes a shared interest in the work that needs to be accomplished in the form of shared responsibility to increase student achievement (Sulit & Davidson, 2020).

Schools that promote distributive leadership practices are experiencing higher teacher retention rates due to increased teacher job satisfaction. The connection established between the principal and all members of the organization creates a system for improvement in which high levels of collaboration and value are given to all stakeholders (Arrowsmith, 2007; Sulit & Davidson, 2020).

Principal Leadership and Influence

A large influencer in the quest to retain teachers beyond three to five years is the perceptions teachers have of their school leadership (Sulit & Davidson, 2020). Teacher perception of their administration is a strong prediction of whether or not teachers will remain in the field (Arrowsmith, 2007). An overarching theme woven within the literature is the connection between supportive leadership, collaborative structures, resources, and environment. Each of these elements supersedes teacher need for higher pay (Allegretto & Mishel, 2016; Hanushek, 2007; Zhang & Neller, 2016).

Leadership success in connection with teacher retention is examined through the traits of the school leader. Principals that focused on an employee-centered approach rather than a product-oriented approach have shown positive results in retaining teachers. Leaders that involve teachers in the decision-making processes experience a greater sense of employee satisfaction that is evidenced though positive student achievement outcomes.

School leadership practices have an undeniable influence on teacher retention. Teachers that feel supported, have the resources they need, and an understanding of the reasoning behind school improvement efforts are more likely to experience feelings of satisfaction. Studies have determined that when teachers feel supported by their administration, they are likely to stay in the field (Urick, 2020). Principal influence on their staff is a primary indicator of whether or not teachers will commit to the profession in the long term. One proposed dilemma is that principals fail to acknowledge their very best teachers and motivate them to stay (Sawchuck, 2012). There is also research that focuses heavily on styles of leadership and the influence they have on teacher retention (Urick, 2020). Three specific attributes are used to describe effective school principals. They implement effective management practices and organization of the school, build teacher capacity, and have a knowledge of content and pedagogy. "The connection between teacher instructional practices and principal support on a day-to-day basis weighs heavily on teacher satisfaction and ultimate retention" (Urick, 2020, p. 4).

Retention and Hard to Staff Schools

Another aspect to examine is the teacher attrition rates in hard to staff schools. Teachers leave the field within their first three to five years for a variety of reasons. Some contributing factors to teacher attrition in lower performing schools are lack of principal capacity, weak organizational structures, student discipline, overwhelming district expectations, and insufficient salary structures (Holmes, Parker, & Gibson, 2019; Horng, 2005; Opfer, 2011). This is especially true in urban environments, which require dedicated and motivated teachers and administrators to lead.

High levels of organizational management are critical for teacher success and student outcomes (Holmes, Parker, & Gibson, 2019). There is an argument that if structures for organization in hard to staff schools are weak, all stakeholder groups are negatively impacted. Administrators that lead hard to staff schools and promote teacher goal setting, mentoring support, actionable feedback, recognition, and promoting collegiality have had a higher success rate at retaining teachers (Holmes, Parker, & Gibson, 2019). Additionally, culturally responsive teaching practices and professional development opportunities enable teachers to move away from traditional methods and support their students in a culturally rich environment (Burnham, 2020). Educational leaders that provide their teachers with the support and professional development needed to meet the needs of unique learners will experience higher teacher satisfaction rates and increases in student achievement.

Mentoring

Districts provide teachers with induction at the onset of their career through the first two to three years. Teacher attrition within the first five years is at its highest among teachers under thirty years of age (Butler, 2018). It takes new teachers three to seven years to become effective practitioners. Many teachers complete the mentoring and induction process through their districts, but still require additional differentiated support based on their level of expertise. Additional guidance and collaboration through the support of a veteran teacher has shown to increase teacher retention. To take it a step further, teaching experience is divided into three experience levels; early career stage, mid-career stage, and late career stage (Bressman, Winter, & Effron, 2018). The literature suggests that although each stage is a progression, each unique individual progresses toward effective practice at different levels. There are many benefits to providing continual support to educators beyond their early years. Teachers continue to develop their expertise at any stage; they feel the support of their colleagues in a safe environment, and they become more deliberate in their instructional planning and practice (Bressman, Winter, & Effron, 2018).

Increased demands and time constraints lead teachers to burnout and ultimately increased attrition rates. The research suggests that there is a strong connection between workload, time constraints, and teacher exhaustion due to high demands and unrealistic expectations. There is a clear connection between teachers leaving the field at higher rates to stress and burnout in the profession (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017, p. 3). The strong association between deadlines and emotional exhaustion suggests that teachers are at risk for developing symptoms of burnout. It is important that school leaders develop a plan for instructional planning and delivery at school through collaborative means. In addition, leaders must effectively communicate to teachers that planning for instruction is critical but within reasonable demands (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017, p. 7). The research states that teachers experience higher satisfaction rates and lower levels of burnout when given time to plan and collaborate with their peers.

Summary and Synopsis of Literature

Teacher retention has been an ongoing topic for debate over the last several decades. Specific factors, both internal and external, can contribute to teacher retention within the first three to five years. This study examines factors such as principal leadership, professional development, and mentoring programs and any potential connections to teacher retention and attrition. This study attempted to understand why teachers leave the teaching profession in the first three to five years and aims to make suggestions as to how to better retain teachers during this period.

According to Sulit and Davidson (2020), retention weighs heavily on the perceptions that teachers have of their supervisors' leadership practices and can have an impact on whether or not a teacher decides to remain in the field. Distributive leadership practices present an inclusive approach to leadership in a

way that is shared, creating and promoting a sense of shared responsibility between teachers and leaders, potentially leading to better school improvement outcomes. It can be assumed that because teacher retention issues seem to become a problem in the first three to five years (Hughes, 2012; Perrachione, Rosser, & Petersen, 2008; Rockoff, 2008; Zhang & Zeller, 2016), that the research conducted in this study will only further exemplify the connection between teacher support and retention.

Reitman and Karge (2019) argue that higher retention rates are directly connected with support in the early years in certain activities, such as training in lesson planning, cultural diversity and differentiated instruction. These trainings focused on by the authors were considered in service trainings that teachers receive early within the individuals' career as a dominant variable for decisions to stay in the field. Teachers that have received the training in these areas were more likely to remain in the field past the three to five year mark.

Lastly, this study examined the impact that effective mentoring programs have on teacher retention. Novice teachers that have the ability to work with and observe more experienced teachers through common planning and instructional rounds are likely to feel more satisfaction due to the collaborative working and learning environment (Shuls & Flores, 2020). This study seeks to uncover key information on how teachers within year's three to five feel that mentoring programs have affected their ability to persist in the profession.

Methodology

The teachers that participated in this study are within their first three to five years in the field and represent three different elementary schools with varying demographics in a large Central Florida school district. Each of the school settings differ in terms of socioeconomics, overall school performance, and demographics. One out of the three schools showed significant disparity in terms of socioeconomics. The other two schools illustrated in the study showed similar socioeconomic data. Each of the three schools have a high population of English Language learners. Additionally, all schools surveyed have a Hispanic population that is greater than sixty percent. The community and parent involvement at each of the schools varied based on the location. The teachers at each of the school sites are referred to throughout the research study as subjects A-J to preserve anonymity. The participants engaged in structured interviews and answered specific questions developed by the researcher prior to the start of data collection. Using grounded theory enabled participants to share perspectives on their personal experiences through a holistic lens. The qualitative data gathered throughout the study supports the generation of new ideas based on individual participant's responses. The responses gathered provided rich descriptions about each participant's perspectives on factors that influence teacher retention.

This study seeks to understand factors that influence teacher retention in the first three to five years. The three research questions listed in the previous section will guide the study through structured interviews to support findings and common

trends in the participant's answers. In order to collect sufficient qualitative data, the research methodology seeks to develop a deeper understanding of teacher attrition based on principal leadership, mentoring relationships, and professional development opportunities. Participants engage in structured interviews that induce specific information regarding teacher retention in relation to their current experiences and perspectives. This qualitative methodology guides the process of gaining a deeper understanding of participants' perspective on the topic. "The goal of grounded theory research is not to begin with a theory and then set out to collect data that proves it; the goal is to begin with a particular phenomenon in mind and permit those aspects that are relevant to the phenomenon to emerge during the study" (Mertler, 2021, p. 82).

The grounded theory approach seeks to answer the research questions by providing a naturalistic approach with interviews conducted in the subjects' familiar setting. "Grounded theory methods are suitable for studying individual processes, interpersonal relations, and reciprocal effects between individuals and larger social processes" (Charmaz, 1996, p. 28). The interviews conducted produced comparative data to analyze and develop further insight into factors that cause teachers to leave the field of education within the first three to five years; "these methods are useful for studying typical social psychological topics such as motivation, personal experience, emotions, identity, attraction, prejudice, and interpersonal co-operation and conflict" (Charmaz, 1996, p. 29).

Grounded theory is the most suitable framework for this study because participants have the ability to share specific perspectives in relation to each to the three research questions. The interview process aims to compile, code, and compare data based on each of the research questions. The interviews and associated questions lend themselves to analysis and synthesis of the data collected through the interview process. Further exploration of the questions and participant reflection provides a comparison to current theories that exist regarding teacher retention. Additionally, the study aims to enhance the understanding by comparing emerging themes among participants. Grounded theory provides a framework to collect and continually analyze the data; "Data are collected and analyzed, and a theory is proposed; more data are collected and analyzed, and the theory revised; data continue to be collected and analyzed, and the theory continues to be developed until a point of saturation is reached" (Mertler, 2021, p. 82).

The participants provide insight based on the research questions to gather information that provides holistic data. The grounded theory methodology does not seek to prove a current theory. "The term grounded theory reflects the way that the explanation or theory which emerges from the research is grounded or justified in the data collected" (Harris, 2014, p. 3). The goal for this study is to uncover the social and psychological factors that influence teachers to remain in the field beyond their third through fifth years. All schools and names of participants have been blinded with pseudonyms to protect the identity of both the schools and the teachers.

Justification of Methodology

  Qualitative methodology selected for this study is appropriate because the purpose of the study is to gather holistic information derived from perspectives of participants. The data from the interviews were gathered and coded to determine common trends in responses to interview questions. While this study could have been examined using a mixed methods approach, utilizing both qualitative and quantitative data, or a quantitative approach tracking teachers from their initial year through their separation year, this methodology best fit the research questions because it provided new insights based on participant responses and unique perspectives. Table 1 provides school demographic and subgroup data, and Table 2 provides demographic information regarding the study participants.

Participants

Table 1. School Demographic and Subgroup Data

School	Enrollment	Hispanic	White	Black	Asian	Multiple	ESE	ELL	FRL
Somerset Elementary	1011	61.0%	22.5%	6.9%	7.2%	2.4%	12.0%	26.0%	38.0%
Edison Elementary	617	62.4%	16.7%	15.5%	1.8%	3.7%	14.0%	31.0%	60.0%
Highland Park Elementary	830	78.2%	4.3%	14.1%	2.0%	1.1%	15.7%	29.2%	99.4%

Table 2. Interview Participant Demographics: Elementary Teachers

School	Participant	Years of Experience	Gender	Race	Grade Taught
Somerset Elementary	A	5	Female	White	3
Somerset Elementary	B	3	Female	Hispanic	2
Somerset Elementary	C	5	Female	White	1
Somerset Elementary	D	4	Female	White	4
Edison Elementary	E	4	Female	Hispanic	ASD K-2
Edison Elementary	F	3	Female	White	5
Highland Park Elementary	G	4	Female	Hispanic	4
Highland Park Elementary	H	3	Female	White	3
Highland Park Elementary	I	3	Female	Multi	3
Highland Park Elementary	J	5	Female	White	3

  Ten participants were chosen for this study across a Central Florida School District that were within the first three to five years of the teaching profession. The participants were referred to as a letter A-O throughout the study to preserve anonymity. This study examined three schools with varying demographics, and to protect the privacy of the schools and participants, the school names are not real. The school names used for the study are Somerset Elementary School, Edison Elementary School, and Highland Park Elementary. Each of the participants taught

at different elementary schools (kindergarten through fifth grade) with varying demographics and socioeconomic status across a large Central Florida School District. Participants were called to the study through the support of their current building level principals. Each school that participated designated a point of contact to support recruitment of participants for the study. Of the ten participants interviewed, five were Caucasian, four were Hispanic, and one was Multiracial. Three teachers interviewed were third grade teachers, three were fourth grade teachers, one teaches in a self-contained Autistic Spectrum Disorder classroom, one teaches first grade, one teaches second grade and one teaches fifth grade.

As indicated in Table 1, the demographics of the three schools are as follows; Somerset Elementary School (2019 data) has a school enrollment of 1011 students with 61% being Hispanic, 22.5% white, 6.9% Black, 7.2% Asian, and 2.4% multiple. Thirty eight percent (38%) of students receive free and reduced lunch (FRL), 26% of students being English Language Learners (ELL) and 12% of students receiving Exceptional Student Education services (ESE). Somerset Elementary has maintained a school grade of "A" from the Florida Department of Education every year since its opening in 2015.

Edison Elementary (2019 data) has a school enrollment of 617 with 62.4% Hispanic, 16.7% white, 15.5% black, 1.8% Asian, 3.7% multiple. Sixty percent (60%) of students receive free and reduced lunch (FRL), 31% of students being English Language Learners (ELL) and 14% of students receiving Exceptional Student Education services (ESE). Edison Elementary school has a school rating of "B" based on the Florida Department of Education for the 2019-2020 school year. Due to the lack of FSA data for the 2020-2021 school year, Edison Elementary is a corrective program school based on their school-wide 2020-2021 iReady data. As a corrective programs school, Edison Elementary receives additional supports from the curriculum and instruction department at the district.

Highland Park Elementary School has 830 students. The school demographics are 78.2 % Hispanic, 4.3% white, 14.1% black, 2% Asian, 1.1% multiple. Within these demographics, Highland Park Elementary has an ELL population of 29.2% and an ESE population of 15.7%. The school has a free and reduced lunch rate of 99.4% and all students receive free meals. Highland Park has been under district supervision and received a "C" school grade for the 2019-2020 school year.

Procedures

Participants met with the interviewer for a thirty-minute session. Interviews were conducted face-to-face, and also through telecommunication means (Zoom, Skype, FaceTime, due to COVID-19). During the session, participants answered ten questions (See Appendix A). Each participant interview was recorded, and the recordings were transcribed and coded to determine trends in data. After codes were established and trends emerged, data were organized in a way to determine commonalities among answers of the participants. Common themes in answers helped to drive the organization of data collected. After data were analyzed, information was synthesized to create a picture that supports strong evidence that ties directly to the related literature.

Results

Research Question 1: What factors influence teacher retention in the field of education within the first 3-5 years of employment?

Qualitative interviews conducted began with questions to gauge the factors that influenced participants to become teachers. The first question focused on factors that influenced participants to become teachers. Out of ($n = 10)$ participants, four shared that teaching was a second career, three participants were influenced by family members that maintained long term careers in education, two participants were influenced by a childhood teacher, and one shared that they always wanted to be a teacher ever since they were a young child. Participants shared that each day when they travel to work, they look forward to three very specific occurrences. All participants shared that they look forward to seeing their students and planning for an engaging day of learning. Teacher H from Somerset Elementary shared that, "I look forward to two things on my way to work. I definitely look forward to seeing my students and just seeing them every single day; that is the main reason. I also love my job and how I get to interact with my colleagues and peers." Additionally, six participants shared that they look forward to seeing their colleagues. Teacher H further stated, "A big second factor is my co-workers. They play a huge role in the work environment so when you work with really great people, it makes work a lot easier to come to." Farber (2011) states that teachers need time to collaborate, problem solve, and share successes on a regular basis. Teacher E from Somerset Elementary elaborated on this point; "I've got a good set of friends here at Somerset Elementary that are really like my support system, so having then day in and day out and coming to work knowing I've got them is huge for me." The research and interviews by participants suggest that creating a collaborative environment and a welcoming school culture may positively affect long-term teacher retention.

The topic of principal leadership produced multiple layers of responses from participants. Participant E, an Autistic Spectrum Disorder teacher in a self-contained classroom from Somerset Elementary school shared that, "Administration could support me more. I mean, there is a lack of support for ESE teachers. I noticed that I received more support when I was a Kindergarten teacher. I mean, I've got a lot of kids, and not enough hands in my classroom." Participant F from Highland Park elementary shared that, "So far this year I have been really appreciative of my administration. To assist me better, I would say to have a once a month check in to see if anything could be improved upon." The principal's influence on their staff is a primary indicator of whether or not teachers will commit to the profession in the long term (Sawchuck, 2012). The research suggests that principal influence is a defining factor in teacher retention and enhanced levels of support for high needs classrooms may indicate greater retention in hard to staff classrooms and schools.

Qualitative interviews conducted regarding factors that influence teacher retention, showed student behavior as an influencing factor. Four participants shared that, "Behaviors in the classroom and the lack of support have contributed to daily challenges." Urick (2020) states, "School administrators and their leadership

practices have an undeniable influence on teacher retention. Teachers that feel supported, have the resources they need, and an understanding of the reasoning behind school improvement efforts are more likely to experience feelings of satisfaction." This finding may produce some evidence that leadership support through effective school structures and systems may increase teacher satisfaction.

Another important aspect to note as a trend among interviewees was the additional planning time provided by the district through ESSER (Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief) funding due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Teacher B from Highland Park Elementary shared, "They gave us additional planning days this year and every month we get the chance to sit down with our team and instructional coach to plan. During these planning days we are able to develop lessons for the next four to six weeks. These planning days helped me a whole lot." This finding may suggest that when additional planning time is provided for teachers, it could increase teacher satisfaction by providing time to complete required tasks. This is an important factor to highlight as Bankston (2019) states, "Often, this work is done in isolation, leading teachers to feel they are on their own when facing instructional challenges. School leaders can avoid this pitfall by building opportunities for collaboration into the staff meeting and professional development schedule. Teachers grow both in confidence and in skill when they are given the time to collaborate with their colleagues who teach the same content or students."

> **Research Question 2**: How can districts plan to support teachers beyond their third year in the field?

Qualitative data collection from ten participant interviews *(n =10)* explored a variety of ways districts can plan to support teachers beyond their fifth year in the field. Three participants shared that they had been in a different school each year in the current school district. Teacher F from Highland Park Elementary shared that, "So far my biggest challenge has been going to a new school every year. I was unfortunately at the bottom of the totem pole and I wasn't re-appointed my first two years. Having to switch to a new school each year has been physically and mentally exhausting. The strain mentally of not knowing if you will have a job and having to get acquainted with a new staff year after year is challenging." This evidence may indicate that districts could examine other means for recalculation of instructional positions (i.e., evaluation versus seniority).

Two teachers shared that their instructional coaches had an impact on their progress as developing professionals. Teacher A from Edison Elementary shared, "I always appreciated the professional development support that I was offered as a new teacher. Our instructional coach was so helpful and would provide support by asking what I wanted to work on. She would offer to observe while I implemented strategies during a lesson." Sulit and Davidson (2020) suggests that distributive leadership practices may support teacher retention. Distributive leadership suggests that there is deliberate planning for sharing leadership that is communicated from the top down. "In the distributive leadership environment, teacher relationships, opportunities for decision-making, and support from colleagues are typical. This may increase teachers' organizational commitment and encourage them to remain

in the classroom" (Sulit & Davidson, 2020, p. 9). This evidence may suggest that the distributed leadership approach could be a model that districts use to support building level principals in building capacity in their instructional staff.

Participants shared insight into individual growth plans and district procedures. Eight participants shared that the evaluation system met their professional learning needs where one felt that the evaluation system was a mere formality. When asked about feedback on evaluations, teachers shared that, they appreciated feedback to help improve their instructional practice. Teacher D from Highland Park Elementary shared that, "If I am not applying on a specific element, I receive feedback to help improve my practice. This helps me tremendously, as I am always learning." Teacher A from Somerset Elementary shared, "I've really enjoyed getting feedback on learning how to implement new strategies to help my students and to help improve my practice." When asked about professional growth plans, the forty percent of teachers shared that they did not feel it was beneficial. Teacher F from Edison Elementary shared, "I don't think it's beneficial. I get stressed out on whether or not I am going to implement the strategies incorrectly. It's hard to pick an element to focus on at the beginning of the year since you are just learning about your students." These interviews may provide some insight into the effectiveness of the overall evaluation system and its unique components (individual growth plans and the value participants found in each). This information may support districts in examining the current teacher evaluation systems to support school-based administrators in rolling out professional growth plans to teachers.

Overall, all of the participants agreed that district providing support through additional planning days proved to be extremely beneficial. Participants were asked about how their leadership could support them in balancing instruction with required compliance items. Teacher B from Edison Elementary shared that, "The district gave us additional planning days, this was extremely helpful. We were able to work with our coaches on lesson planning as well as complete required paperwork and accommodation logs." Teacher F from Highland Park Elementary shared that, "With the district providing the planning days, I think there are 5 this year, this really helped with planning and preparing materials needed for instruction. We meet three times a week and a lot of our time is taken for these kinds of things." The responses from participants may suggest that additional planning days for teachers may increase satisfaction by providing additional time to support the planning process.

> **Research Question 3**: How does principal leadership, mentoring programs, and professional development play a role in teacher retention?

There is evidence that suggests that principal leadership is a key factor in the retention of teachers beyond their fifth year. "Several studies have found that strong principal leadership can promote teacher retention even in contexts where student and teacher characteristics predict that turnover is likely" (Player, Youngs, Perrone, & Grogan, 2017, p. 331). When participants were asked about professional development and mentoring programs, three participants shared that they needed

additional mentoring in their third year of teaching. Teacher J from Edison Elementary shared, "By year three, the district does not offer mentoring support so it is up to the school. I felt I needed more support from a direct mentor even though technically I was not eligible at that point." This response leads the researchers to believe that teachers may need additional support by year three and beyond. Teacher attrition is a challenge in the education profession and is the highest among public school teachers with 3–5 years in the field (Phillips, 2015).

Thus, the purpose of mentoring is not only to pair an experienced teacher with a novice teacher for professional support but for necessary emotional support as well (Butler, 2018, p. 13). The research suggests that teachers may need additional support beyond their third year in the classroom, and this factor could determine long-term success in the field.

Participants shared that professional development was often district driven. Teacher E from Somerset Elementary pointed out that professional development, "was not really offered" outside of the district initiatives, and also felt that leadership did not really understand the need for additional trainings in areas of teacher interest. "I wanted to grow, not that my principal wouldn't want that, but did not send me to trainings more specific to my area. In a sense, I didn't feel supported." This response may suggest that professional development opportunities based on teacher interest could have an impact on overall teacher satisfaction and retention. According to Urick (2020), principals who prioritize the needs of their teachers and staff are more likely to retain their teachers. This information supports the finding and may provide some insight into how principals can connect the needs of their teachers back to the school's needs to determine the best avenues for continued support.

Conclusions

Some conclusions derived from question one are that teachers have left other career paths in search of a more profound and rewarding career. Several of the participants are second career teachers and decided to pursue a career in education to help make an impact in the lives of children. Each participant shared that they look forward to seeing their children each day as they travel to work. Additionally, participants shared and are excited to engage students in productive work to help them succeed. Participants shared that the levels of support for ESE, ELL and students with behavioral needs was an area that was a challenge for them. In addition, participants shared that they often did not have time to complete compliance tasks. Lastly, participant responses shared a common trend that focusing on necessary and relevant school/ district initiatives would increase the overall satisfaction.

An important point to note was how new teachers can be empowered by their administration to collaborate and bring a new perspective. Several participants shared the importance of working on a team where administration and veteran teachers can recognize the important contributions of the novice teacher. Most of the participants shared that they see themselves in education as a teacher in the

classroom for the long haul, while other participants shared that they have interest in aspiring to leadership positions. One participant shared that she did not see herself in education for the long term. Some conclusions derived from these interviews are that about fifty percent of participants are likely to remain in the classroom while the other fifty percent are likely to pursue other avenues; in the field of education or not.

When examining the study, some of the emerging trends and conclusions centered teacher satisfaction on levels of school-based supports teachers receive. Two teachers shared that they wanted to be a teacher since they were very young, three teachers interviewed shared that they were influenced by educators within their families, and five teachers shared that they got into education as a second career. The research question was crafted to determine factors that influence teacher retention. Two common trends that were shared among most participants was the anticipation of seeing students and co-workers each day. Interview question one focused on what teachers look forward to each day when they come to work. Of the ten participants, nine of the teachers answered quickly with the response of their students. Participants shared that regardless of all the responsibilities they carried out daily, their students were the influencing factor for their remaining in their positions. Three of the teachers interviewed followed up with the levels of support that they received from colleagues as something they look forward to each day. Interview questions three though seven focused on how districts and building level principals can support teachers beyond the third year. Some responses that were seen as common trends centered on levels of support provided to teachers with student behaviors in the classroom. Participants shared that the need for additional support with student behaviors created challenges in the day-to-day operations of their classrooms. One conclusion that can be drawn from this data was the need for additional professional development in classroom management. Another important factor that was noted in the interviews was support for alternate route teachers in teaching English language learners and Exceptional Education students. Teacher B from Highland Park Elementary shared that, "Almost 85% of our students are Spanish or of Latin background, so I feel as a school that we need more ESOL support." As districts continue to onboard new teachers that are on alternate certification routes, consideration for the levels of support needed in classrooms is a factor for building level principals to consider.

When considering these factors, the larger picture may present specific state and national implications, "If the supply of highly qualified teachers were plentiful, we might feel no need to worry about turnover, even if it is high and costly. That is not the case currently. In most states, newspaper headlines and supporting data about the effects of shortages—especially in the fields of math and science, special education, and teachers of English learners—are commonplace. Data also show that shortages reach to other fields in the highest-need districts" (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017, p. 49).

When considering the implications at the state and national levels, districts may need to refocus support plans for teacher retention by working with building level principals to help develop a distributive leadership model. This model may

increase teacher capacity through explicit training from staff and coaches on instructional strategies to support diverse learning needs. Additionally, distributive leadership benefits principals and school leaders in regards to the positive effects the practice may have on standardized test scores. "Distributed leadership may serve as a way to build relationships and trust in schools and be part of a comprehensive strategy to raise student test scores, but distributed leadership in isolation will likely not improve test scores (Pierro, 2020, p. 115). Some possible aspects to examine further is the connection between distributive leadership and a clear vision and mission from the school's principal. Other possible implications to explore are the leadership practices that drive the school culture, and how they positively affect faculty and staff. Additionally, providing faculty and staff with opportunities to lead and build relationships through leadership roles can prove to have a positive impact on district, state, and national school systems. Building level principals and districts that support the distributive leadership models must continue to examine how leaders create an environment that allows individuals the chance to contribute and lead within the institution (Pierro, 2020).

Research question two seeks to answer how districts can support teachers beyond their third year in the field. Within this large Central Florida School District, school-wide induction programs are available within the first three years of employment. Four participants agreed that there was a need for additional support beyond year three. When examining the number of participants that chose education as a second career, many of them shared their struggles with basic instructional strategies to support English Language Learners and behaviors in the classroom. Based on this information, second career teachers within their first three to five years may benefit from additional targeted professional development in the realm of instructional strategies and classroom management. "Most educators would argue that no teacher is an expert after just one year of teaching. In my district, in Robbinsville, New Jersey, we believe that novices should receive induction support throughout the four-year tenure process. This length of time provides new hires with opportunities to develop mastery experiences; engage in sustained, job-embedded professional development; cultivate relationships with other novices; receive non-evaluative feedback from administrators and peers; and acquire confidence" (Tew, 2018, p. 2). Possible implications for school districts statewide and nationally that adopt a multilayer induction program may see higher rates of teacher retention beyond three to five years. In this scenario, teachers are receiving additional professional development as they grow more confident in their practice. Tew (2018) argues that a multilayer induction program that consists of a four-year induction program rather than the traditional three year consumes more time and resources, but the long-term benefits should be the focus. "Though many novices have acknowledged that this program requires much more of a time commitment than a traditional model, they have also said that they felt invested in teaching and much more competent because of the strategies they had learned throughout the program (Tew, 2018, p. 4).

Another important aspect to note concerning district support is the amount of time teachers have to plan. Based on the interviews and associated literature, providing teachers with additional planning time to collaborate with colleagues

may help to mitigate the challenges teachers are experiencing with other hinge points discussed in this study. Providing additional time for planning and collaboration may help the novice teacher to learn about proven strategies and systems that can be incorporated into their instruction. Further, additional time for collaboration with peers may increase morale among school staff. When looking at the implications at the state and national levels, additional dollars provided to teachers for planning and collaboration may serve as an incentive in retaining as well as recruiting new teachers. "A study published in 2007 found that, at that time, the costs to school districts of replacing a teacher who leaves in the early part of her career ranged from $4,366 in a small rural district to nearly $18,000 in a large urban district, at an estimated national cost of more than $7 billion annually" (Kini & Podolsky, 2016, p. 29). This information suggests that is may be less costly to provide teachers with additional time rather than the replacement cost of a teacher in the early part of their career. Additionally, teacher-planning days have implications on student achievement. "Students benefit from teacher in-service days through improved instruction. If their teacher really learned something new that helped them grow, they will probably bring it into their classroom with excitement and vigor. Most teachers are in the profession because they really enjoy helping kids. When teachers are exposed to a resource that helps them do a better job meeting that goal, there is usually no hesitation in taking advantage of it right away (Capriola, 2019, p. 8). Another point to consider is how providing teachers with planning days throughout the school year provide them the time they need to develop creative and innovative lessons without the disruption of their day-to-day schedule (Capriola, 2019). Teachers benefit from additional planning by merely having time to think, create, and plan for innovative lessons to engage their students. Students benefit because they have the opportunity to be exposed to meaningful and well thought out lessons to help them reach their academic goals.

There are limitations to this study, only 10 participants were used due to their specific experience (three to five years) in three elementary schools in one school district in Central Florida. While this permitted for rigorous, in-depth qualitative interviews, information may not be directly generalizable for this study. Future directions may involve a larger sample size with additional teachers.

Recommendations

This study served to determine factors that influence teachers beyond their first three to five years in the field. Some points of recommendation based on the data provided by participants was geared toward more specific professional development based on teacher need, additional planning time, and support from administration with student behavior and instructional strategies.

The first recommendation is to provide teachers with additional time for collaboration. Based on the research findings, creating an environment that promotes collegiality and collaboration may have a positive impact on teacher retention. It is the recommendation that districts continue to provide funding and time to support teachers in this process of working together. Time continues to be

a barrier in the field of education, and providing teachers the opportunity to think and plan in a meaningful way may support an enhanced school experience for all students locally, statewide, and nationally.

A second recommendation is to support building level principals with expelling a distributive leadership model. Based on the findings and associated literature, distributive leadership may create an environment where teacher leaders help to lead the mission and vision of the school. Providing specific and focused school and district initiatives that promote meaningful and relevant professional development for teachers is an aspect to consider. Schools may consider how many initiatives they are rolling out to teachers, and how well they align with the needs of the school. This may lead to continued teacher satisfaction and purpose, which could result in teacher retention. Additionally, training building level principals on the distributive leadership model and its connection to school culture may have a positive impact on student outcomes. When coupling a strong mission and vision centered on building capacity, principals may see a positive impact on school culture and leadership advancement on their campuses.

A third recommendation is to provide alternate route teachers with job embedded professional development with daily challenges such as behavior and effectively instructing second language learners and students with special needs. An item to consider is examining the current mentoring programs and their duration. Continued opportunities for teachers to learn and grow through observation and professional development specific to instructional strategies and classroom management may prove to be helpful with second career teachers. The Central Florida school district does offer alternative route teachers support though online learning modules. Additional support through practical learning and application may increase teacher efficacy and overall satisfaction, which may increase teacher retention. Districts that consider adopting a four-year induction program may see a positive increase in instructional practice and overall teacher retention.

A fourth recommendation would be for the district to review current plans in regards to succession planning. The district's current practice has moved away from teacher evaluation/ performance based data to determine job security. The current practice is to use seniority as a means to determine where budget cuts are made. This system does not take into account teacher expertise and causes teachers to move from one school to the next year over year. This could be a contributor to teacher attrition within the first three to five years.

Based on our analysis and the limitations of the study, we recommend further research in the following areas: (1) Instructional pedagogy and supporting the novice teacher with classroom management and effective instructional strategies. Further research may indicate the positive effects on teacher retention through the lens of specific supports in common areas of need. (2) The effects on providing teachers additional planning to support positive student outcomes. Each of the participants shared how time for planning remained an ongoing issue. In this study, the participants shared the positive impact the additional planning days (ESSER funding) had on their overall management of instruction in coordination with compliance tasks. Time has always been a point of contention with teachers, and providing additional planning may prove to increase teacher satisfaction. (3)

Disparity among ethnic groups and teacher retention rates among black and brown school districts in comparison to white peers. (4) Second career teachers and how to provide high levels of support to those that lack college level teacher training. (5) Lastly, the effect of school culture on the novice teacher is an important aspect that for further research. Ultimately, how does environment play a part in the long-term retention of teachers in education? A study that examines school culture and the connection to teacher retention may provide further evidence on teacher retention.

References

Allegretto, S. A., & Mishel, L. (2016). *The Teacher Pay Gap is wider than Ever: Teachers' Pay Continues to Fall Further behind Pay of Comparable Workers*. Economic Policy Institute.

Arrowsmith, T. (2007). Distributed Leadership in Secondary Schools in England: The Impact on the Role of the Headteacher and Other Issues. *Management in Education*, *21*(2), 21-27.

Bankston, K. (2019, April 4). *Strategies to Increase Teacher Retention at Your School*. Retrieved from: https://blog.betterlesson.com/strategies-to-increase-teacher-retention-at-your-school. [Accessed 12 November 2021.]

Bressman, S., Winter, J. S., & Efron, S. E. (2018). Next Generation Mentoring: Supporting Teachers Beyond Induction. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *73*, 162-170.

Burnham, K. (2020, July 31). *Culturally Responsive Teaching: 5 Strategies for Educators*. Northeastern University Graduate Programs.

Butler, M. S. (2018). *Understanding the Mentoring Relationship in Connection to Teacher Retention*. Dissertation. Widener University.

Capriola, D. P. (2019, May 11). *How Teacher In-service and Planning Days Benefit Students. Strategies for Parents*. Retrieved from: https://strategiesforparents.com/how-teacher-in-service-and-planning-days-benefit-students/. [Accessed 19 November 2021.]

Carver-Thomas, D. & Darling-Hammond, L. (2017). *Teacher Turnover: Why it Matters and What we Can Do About it*. Learning Policy Institute. Available at: https://doi.org/10.54300/454.278.

Charmaz, K. (1996). The Search for Meanings - Grounded Theory. In J. A. Smith, R. Harre, & L. Van Lagenhove (eds.), *Rethinking Methods in Psychology* (pp. 27-49). London: SAGE Publications.

Farber, K. (2011, June 15). *Teachers Helping Teachers: 8 Ways To Prevent Burnout*. Edutopia. Retrieved from: https://www.edutopia.org/blog/preventing-teacher-burnout-katy-farber. [Accesses 31 October 2021.]

Hanushek, E. A. (2007). The Single Salary Schedule and Other Issues of Teacher Pay. *Peabody Journal of Education*, *82*(4), 574-586.

Harris, T. (2014). Grounded Theory. *Nursing Standard, 29*(35), 37-43.

Holmes, B., Parker, D. J., & Gibson, J. (2019). Rethinking Teacher Retention in Hard-to-Staff Schools. *Contemporary Issues in Education Research (CIER)*, *12*(1), 27-32.

Horng, E. (2005). *Poor Working Conditions Make Urban Schools Hard-to-Staff*. UCACCORD Public Policy Series.

Hughes, G. D. (2012). Teacher Retention: Teacher Characteristics, School Characteristics, Organizational Characteristics, and Teacher Efficacy. *The Journal of Educational Research*, *105*(4), 245-255.

Kini, T., & Podolsky, A. (2016) *Does Teaching Experience Increase Teacher Effectiveness? A Review of the Research*. Palo Alto: Learning Policy Institute.

Loeb, S., & Miller, L. C. (2006). *A Review of State Teacher Policies: What are they, What are their Effects, and What are Their Implications for School Finance?* Governor's Committee on Education Excellence.

Mertler, C. A. (2021). *Introduction to Educational Research*. SAGE Publications.

Opfer, D. (2011). Defining and Identifying Hard-to-Staff Schools: The Role of School Demographics and Conditions. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, *47*(4), 582-619.

Perrachione, B. A., Rosser, V. J., & Petersen, G. J. (2008). Why Do they Stay? Elementary Teachers' Perceptions of Job Satisfaction and Retention. *Professional Educator*, *32*(2), 2.

Phillips, J. C. (2015). *Retaining Rural Educators: Characteristics of Teacher Retention Practices of Rural School Districts*. Lindenwood University.

Pierro, J. (2020) *Using Distributed Leadership to Impact Student Achievement*. Theses and Dissertations. 2809. Rowan University.

Player, D., Youngs, P., Perrone, F., & Grogan, E. (2017). How Principal Leadership and Person-Job Fit are Associated with Teacher Mobility and Attrition. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *67*(Oct), 330-339.

Reitman, G. C., & Karge, B. D. (2019). Investing in Teacher Support Leads to Teacher Retention: Six Supports Administrators Should Consider for New Teachers. Multicultural Education, *27*(1), 7-18.

Rockoff, J. E. (2008). *Does Mentoring Reduce Turnover and Improve Skills of New Employees? Evidence from Teachers in New York City* (No. w13868). National Bureau of Economic Research.

Ross, L., Lutfi, G. A., & Hope, W. C. (2016). Distributed Leadership and Teachers' Affective Commitment. *NASSP Bulletin*, *100*(3), 159-169.

Sawchuck, S. (2012, August 8). Principals Criticized on Teacher-Retention Decisions. *Education Week*, *31*(37), 1-4.

Shuls, V. J. & Flores, M. J. (2020). Improving Teacher Retention through Support and Development, *Journal of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies*, 4(1).

Skaalvik, E. M., & Skaalvik, S. (2017). Motivated for Teaching? Associations with School Goal Structure, Teacher Self-efficacy, Job Satisfaction and Emotional Exhaustion. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *67*(Oct), 152-160.

Sulit, A., & Davidson, F. D. (2020). Increasing Elementary and Middle School Teacher Retention Through Meaningful Distributive Leadership Practices. *ICPEL Education Leadership Review, 21*(1).

Tew, K. (2018, June 29). *The Benefits of a Multiyear Induction Program*. Edutopia. Retrieved from: https://www.edutopia.org/article/benefits-multiyear-induction-pro gram. [Accessed 19 November 2021.]

Torrance, D. (2013). Distributed Leadership: Challenging Five Generally Held Assumptions. *School Leadership & Management*, *33*(4), 354-372.

Urick, A. (2020). What Type of School Leadership Makes Teachers Want to Stay? *NASSP Bulletin*, 104(3), 145-176.

Watlington, E., Shockley, R., Guglielmino, P., & Felsher, R. (2010). The High Cost of Leaving: An Analysis of the Cost of Teacher Turnover. *Journal of Education Finance*, *36*(1), 22-37.

Zhang, G., & Zeller, N. (2016). A Longitudinal Investigation of the Relationship Between Teacher Preparation and Teacher Retention. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, *43*(2), 73-92.

Appendix A

Interview Questions

1. Why did you decide to pursue a career in education and what were the influencing factors?
2. When you travel to work each day, what are some of the things you look forward to and why?
3. How could your administration make your work experience better for you?
4. When you became a teacher, what was your vision for the future for your career?
5. What are some of the challenges you have experienced being a teacher and share the ways that your leadership could support change with this?
6. How does your administration play a role in supporting your professional development and in what ways do you feel empowered and motivated to participate in school wide initiatives?
7. In a perfect world, teachers would have more time to devote to instruction and less time on paperwork and compliance. What are some ways that you feel your administration could support you in balancing both of these important aspects of your job?
8. Does the current evaluation system address your professional learning needs and explain your thoughts on receiving feedback from your administrators?
9. Do you feel that feedback on your instructional practice empowers you to learn and grow? Explain how this helps/ hinders your professional growth
10. What does good morale look like to you in a school and in what ways can your leadership work to improve overall morale?