Cultivating Positive Work Contexts That Promote Teacher Job Satisfaction and Retention in High-Need Schools

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- **Teacher turnover continues to perpetuate shortages in U.S. schools, particularly within settings that serve students with disabilities, economic disadvantages, or other obstacles to their education.**
- **Recent studies suggest high teacher turnover in high-need settings is not reflective of problems associated with the needs of their students, but instead is a result of high stress and job dissatisfaction due to poor working conditions.**
- **This article reports results of a survey on the working conditions and quality of work experiences of public school teaching staff that served students with multiple risk factors. The school provided services for students whose least restrictive environment was a separate school for those with intense emotional disturbance needs. In addition, most of the students experienced economic hardship and had histories of childhood trauma, behavior problems, and academic underachievement.**
- **The majority of respondents indicated they were satisfied with their working conditions and quality of work experiences. Correlational analyses revealed that participant job satisfaction was most strongly associated with perceptions of supportive school leadership and positive relationships with administrators and other personnel.**
- **Given the survey results and findings of other recent studies, recommendations for practice for special education leaders and administrators in other high-need schools are discussed.**

Key words: Working Conditions, Work Context, Job Satisfaction, Administrative Support, Teacher/Staff Retention.

What Are High-Need Schools and Why Is Teacher Turnover a Critical Issue?

School leaders must attract teachers who are enthusiastic, engaged, and committed to their jobs. However, teacher turnover continues to cause problematic teacher shortages across U.S. public schools (Ingersoll, Merrill, & May, 2012), particularly in high-need schools (HNS) (Haynes, 2014; Ingersoll, Merrill, & Stuckey, 2014). HNS serve disproportionate numbers of students with disabilities, economic disadvantages, or other obstacles to their education (Berry, Petrin, Gravelle, & Farmer, 2011; Billingsley, 2004; Cancio, Albrecht, & Johns, 2013; Johnson, Kraft, & Papay, 2012; Ronfeldt, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2013). HNS generally experience 50% greater turnover rates than average (Haynes, 2014; Ingersoll et al., 2014). Some schools are considered high need because they are located in high-poverty areas and serve students facing economic hardship (Petty, Fitchett, & O'Connor, 2012). Other HNS are purposefully created to allow public school systems flexibility in addressing specific student needs. For example, many U.S. school districts offer alternative schools to give students expelled for disciplinary problems an opportunity to receive their education (Carver et al.,

2010). In addition, open campus and credit recovery schools are designed to allow students who have fallen behind a chance to earn credits to get back on track for high school graduation (Carver et al., 2010). Special education schools address disability-related needs as part of the spectrum of services under the Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act (IDEA) (2004). Although most students with disabilities (SWDs) are served in inclusive settings along with nondisabled peers, some have needs that require a more restrictive setting. During the 2013–2014 school year, 2.9% of SWDs were served in a separate school (United States Department of Education [USDOE], 2016). SWDs most frequently placed in separate schools were receiving services under the classifications of deaf-blindness, emotional disturbance (ED), or multiple disabilities classifications (USDOE, 2016). The present study examined the work context for the teaching staff of a special education school for students with severe externalizing behaviors (e.g., emotional outbursts, physical and verbal aggression) associated with ED.

Although employment trends suggest teachers leave HNS for schools that serve higher-achieving students (Ingersoll et al., 2014), studies suggest that teachers will stay in HNS when working conditions are satisfactory and the school climate is positive (Petty et al., 2012; Simon & Johnson, 2015; Thapa, Cohen, Guffey, & Higgins-D'Alessandro, 2013). Many teachers desire to work in HNS (Greenlee & Brown, 2009; Petty et al., 2012). Effective teachers can have a greater positive impact on students in HNS (Haynes, 2014). However, teacher turnover is high under harsh working conditions (Simon & Johnson, 2015). To attract and retain a qualified teaching staff, school leaders must cultivate satisfactory working conditions that promote high-quality work experiences (Billingsley, 2010; Greenlee & Brown, 2009; Petty et al., 2012; Simon & Johnson, 2015). Otherwise, good teachers will leave these schools.

What Is the Relationship Between Working Conditions and Quality of Work Experience?

Working conditions affect teachers' quality of work experience and ultimately impact student outcomes (Simon & Johnson, 2015; Thapa et al., 2013). Higher teacher job satisfaction has been associated with other quality work indicators, such as (a) lower occupational stress (Brunsting, Sreckovic, & Lane, 2014; Emery & Vandenberg, 2010; Montgomery & Rupp, 2005), (b) higher teacher efficacy or beliefs in their abilities to perform as teachers (Martin, Sass, & Schmitt, 2012; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2010), (c) positive interpersonal interactions in the school (Grayson & Alvarez, 2008; Simon & Johnson, 2015), and (d) stronger job commitment (Billingsley, 2004; Boe, Cook, & Sunderland, 2008; Borman & Dowling, 2008; Simon & Johnson, 2015).

Which Working Conditions Are Most Vital to Job Satisfaction in HNS?

Special education leaders must be familiar with working conditions associated with job satisfaction and quality work experiences (Billingsley, 2010). Studies in HNS (e.g., Simon & Johnson, 2015) have explored which working conditions mattered most for teachers. Overall, the most important working conditions for teachers consistently involve (a) school leadership, (b) workplace relationships, and (c) job design.

School Leadership. Previous studies (e.g., Pas, Bradshaw, & Hershfeldt, 2012; Petty et al., 2012) suggest school leadership practices are the strongest determinant of teacher job satisfaction. Teachers have identified the following characteristics of effective school leadership: (a) consistent enforcement of school policies, (b) support for student behavior management, (c) regular communication and constructive feedback, (d) flexibility for teacher autonomy, (e) teacher inclusion in school-wide decision making, (f) allocation of necessary resources, and (g) mentorships for new teachers (Petty et al., 2012; Simon & Johnson, 2015; Stewart-Banks, Kuofie, Hakim, & Branch, 2015). Conversely, inadequate administrative support has been associated with lower job satisfaction, higher occupational stress, lower teacher efficacy, and less job commitment among HNS teachers (Borman & Dowling, 2008; Grayson & Alvarez, 2008; Greenlee & Brown, 2009; Pas et al., 2012; Robinson, Bridges, & Rollins, 2017; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2007). Thus, school leadership is critical to teachers' work context.

Workplace Relationships. Although research has emphasized the importance of administrative support in HNS (e.g., Petty et al., 2012; Simon & Johnson, 2015), other working relationships also affect job satisfaction. Teachers who reported having

positive interactions with colleagues, other school personnel, students, and parents/guardians experienced higher job satisfaction (Borman & Dowling, 2008; Simon & Johnson, 2015). Conversely, negative interpersonal dynamics marked by gossip, secrecy, mood instability, inconsistency, or disengagement were associated with job dissatisfaction (Grayson & Alvarez, 2008; Hughes, 2012; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2007). A teaching staff that works cohesively and maintains positive relationships enjoys better quality work experiences (Borman & Dowling, 2008; Simon & Johnson, 2015) and contributes to a positive school climate (Thapa et al., 2013). Thus, workplace relationships are an essential component of the work context.

Job Design. Job design refers to the interrelated set of structures, systems, and processes intended to support major work objectives (Gersten, Keating, Yovanoff, & Harniss, 2001). Although roles vary across different schools, there are similarities in the job design across all teaching staff. These include responsibilities to manage student behaviors, engage students in learning, and meet specific accountability measures as well as the resources available for meeting these expectations (Grayson & Alvarez, 2008; Owens, 2015; Richards, 2012). In HNS, students experience barriers to their education that may place heavier workloads on their teachers (Simon & Johnson, 2015). For example, parents and guardians may lack resources taken for granted in more privileged settings (e.g., ability to pay for a tutor, exposure to enrichment opportunities). The role of the teaching staff is, therefore, more critical in HNS because they are often the only ones who can address their students' educational needs (Greenlee & Brown, 2009; Simon & Johnson, 2015). Students of the school at which the present study took place had complex needs. They were diagnosed with and exhibited severe behavior manifestations of mental disorders, such as bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, conduct disorder, oppositional defiant disorder, and post-traumatic stress disorder. In addition, most students had a history of school discipline problems and economic disadvantages. Many students had also experienced adverse childhood events that contributed to mental health issues and behavior problems (Pressley, Houchins, Varjas, Johnson, & Kane, 2016). Thus, the school's teaching staff had to address intense student needs on top of the typical mandates, placing them at greater risk for occupational burnout and the likelihood of leaving their positions if they do not have adequate leadership, collegial, and material support within their job design (Simon & Johnson, 2015).

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How Do Personnel From a Special Education School Serving Students With Multiple Risk Factors Perceive Their Work Context?

Work context matters when attracting and retaining a qualified teaching staff (Billingsley, 2010). In HNS, teachers are especially critical in their students' outcomes (Haynes, 2014). The purpose of the present study was to explore perceptions of working conditions and quality of work experience among the teaching staff in a special education school by answering the following research questions (RQ):

RQ1: How does the teaching staff from a special education school rate its satisfaction with working conditions pertaining to (a) school leadership, (b) workplace relationships, and (c) job design?

RQ2: How does the teaching staff from a special education school rate the quality of its work experience in terms of (a) job satisfaction, (b) occupational stress, (c) teacher efficacy, (d) interpersonal interactions, and (e) job commitment?

RQ3: What is the relationship between overall job satisfaction and (a) satisfaction with working conditions and (b) quality of work experience?

RQ4: Do participants differ in their ratings of their working conditions and quality work experience according to (a) gender, (b) teaching experience, (c) role, and (d) program type?

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The School. The setting for the present study was a regional division of a statewide education program that provided a continuum of services for local school districts under IDEA (2004). The program was specifically for students exhibiting severe externalizing behaviors associated with ED, grades K–12, and was located in a large urban area in the southeastern United States. Students were referred to this school by their local school system through the individual education program (IEP) process. Length of placement varied according to the needs of each student. The goal was to return students to less restrictive settings as they developed coping skills and required less intensive supports.

The school consisted of a main campus, a separate school serving one of the local school districts within the region, and smaller programs that were separate entities within larger schools. In addition to ED, many students were also eligible under secondary classifications, such as other health impairment (due to attention deficit hyperactivity disorder), autism, learning disabilities, and mild intellectual disabilities. In each classroom, there were approximately five to 10 students, a state-certified special education teacher, and at least one state-certified paraprofessional.

The Teaching Staff. All teaching personnel were recruited for participation in the study. Participants were recruited on their first day of preplanning for the 2016–2017 school year. According to the program director, approximately 60 staff members, more than 90% of which are African-American, were present and invited to take the survey. As they were asked to provide responses according to their work context from the previous school year, only the returning staff members could participate in the study. Fifty-five respondents provided their informed consent and completed the survey (91.6% response rate). Data from 10 respondents were excluded from the analyses because they identified their role as either an administrator, social worker, or something other than teacher or paraprofessional. Paraprofessionals were included as part of the school's teaching staff. Thus far, very little research has specifically addressed paraprofessional working conditions (Tillery, Werts, Roark, & Harris, 2003). However, they are an integral part of the learning environment because paraprofessionals build relationships with students, manage behaviors, assist with instruction, and address IEP accommodations (Fisher & Pleasants, 2012). They also interact with administration, other teaching staff, and parents and guardians. Because of the relatively high number of paraprofessionals in this school ($n = 25$), they represent more than half of the instructional staff. Any differences between teachers and paraprofessionals in responses to survey items were accounted in the data analyses. *Table 1* provides further details on participant demographics.

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of respondents ($N = 45$)

Characteristic	*n*	%
Gender		
Male	13	28.3
Female	29	64.4
Role		
Teacher	20	44.4
Paraprofessional	25	55.6
Location		
Main campus	28	62.2
Other than main campus	17	37.8
Years of teaching experience (any K–12)*		
0–5	26	57.8
6–10	7	15.6
11–15	4	8.9
16–20	4	8.9
21+	3	6.7
Years of teaching experience (any HNS)*		
0–5	22	48.9
6–10	8	17.8
11–15	6	13.3
16–20	5	11.1
21+	3	6.7
Years of teaching experience (current program)*		
0–5	28	62.2
6–10	8	17.8
11–15	3	6.7
16–20	3	6.7
21+	1	2.2

* Participants were instructed to base their responses on the number of years of teaching experience prior to the 2015–2016 school year.

The Survey. A 43-item survey requested participant information and prompted 4-point Likert-type responses to items regarding their perceptions of

Table 2: Participant responses for satisfaction with their working conditions ($N = 45$)

Working condition	Very dissatisfied		Dissatisfied		Satisfied		Very satisfied		
	n	(%)	*n*	(%)	*n*	(%)	*n*	(%)	*M* (*SD*)
School leadership									
Support from administration in enforcing student discipline	4	(8.9)	7	(15.6)	23	(51.1)	11	(24.4)	2.91 (0.78)
Support from administration that empowers me to perform my best on the job (e.g., constructive feedback, encouragement, advocacy)	4	(8.9)	6	(13.3)	21	(46.7)	14	(31.1)	3.00 (0.91)
Level of autonomy allowed in my position	3	(6.7)	3	(6.7)	26	(57.8)	13	(28.9)	3.09 (0.79)
School-wide system for behavior management procedures for students	4	(8.9)	5	(11.1)	24	(53.3)	12	(26.7)	2.98 (0.87)
Method of job performance evaluation	3	(6.7)	2	(4.4)	31	(68.9)	9	(20.0)	3.02 (0.72)
Workplace relationships									
Relationships with school administrators**	3	(6.7)	3	(6.7)	23	(51.1)	14	(31.1)	3.12 (0.82)
Relationships with other school personnel (e.g., teachers, paraprofessionals)*	2	(4.4)	5	(11.1)	20	(44.4)	17	(37.8)	3.18 (0.82)
Relationships with students*	1	(2.2)	2	(4.4)	23	(51.1)	18	(40.0)	3.32 (0.67)
Relationships with students' parents or guardians**	3	(6.7)	4	(8.9)	26	(57.8)	10	(22.2)	3.00 (0.79)
Job design									
Assigned workload*	5	(11.1)	5	(11.1)	22	(48.9)	12	(26.7)	2.93 (0.93)
Amount of required paperwork	3	(6.7)	7	(15.6)	27	(60.0)	8	(17.8)	2.89 (0.78)
Availability of instructional resources (e.g., technology, supplies, textbooks)	5	(11.1)	9	(20.0)	21	(46.7)	10	(22.2)	2.80 (0.92)
My ongoing professional development opportunities	2	(4.4)	3	(6.7)	24	(53.3)	16	(35.6)	3.20 (0.76)
Amount of individual planning time available (not including department or collaborative planning)**	6	(13.3)	7	(15.6)	23	(51.1)	7	(15.6)	2.72 (0.91)
Amount of collaborative planning time available (with co-teachers or department)*	4	(8.9)	7	(15.6)	23	(51.1)	11	(24.4)	2.84 (0.89)

* ($N = 44$);
** ($N = 43$).

working conditions and the quality of their work experiences. The survey was developed specifically for this study. Items were constructed according to previous research (e.g., Haynes, 2014; Simon & Johnson, 2015) pertaining to teacher working conditions and quality of work experience in HNS. Survey items were reviewed by five experts: one teacher educator, three teachers, and one paraprofessional. The final draft was then presented to the school's director for approval.

In the data analyses, seven items were omitted as they pertained to policy-level conditions that could not be influenced by school-level administration (e.g., compensation, mandated curriculum). The first section prompted satisfaction ratings (very dissatisfied, dissatisfied, satisfied, or very satisfied)

with various working conditions. Then, they were asked to indicate their overall occupational stress for the previous school year (no stress, mild stress, moderate stress, or high stress). The next section inquired about the quality of work experiences (e.g., ability to deliver high-quality instruction, ability to manage student behaviors) based on their agreement (strongly disagree, disagree, agree, strongly agree) with statements pertaining to their teaching positions.

The final section asked participants for demographic information. They were asked specifically about gender, to assess for potential differences between male and female respondents. They were also asked about their role (i.e., teacher or paraprofessional) and program (i.e., main campus or other) as well as their years of prior teaching experience (in K–12, any HNS, or their current HNS) as these variables may affect their perceptions of work context. *Tables 2*, *3*, and *4* include the actual survey items used for the study. A copy of the survey instrument may be obtained by contacting the study's primary author.

Study Procedures. Approval to conduct this study was obtained through the institutional review board of the primary author's university. During a whole staff meeting, the primary investigator described the study's purpose to the prospective participants. In addition, she explained the survey was voluntary, anonymous, and that participants could choose to skip any items they preferred not to answer. The primary investigator then shared the link to the Qualtrics Internet-based survey through the participants' work-related e-mail. She also was available on campus to answer any questions participants had regarding the survey or study. Participants were required to provide informed consent through a web-based form before they could proceed with responding to survey items.

How Did Participants Rate Their Work Context?

Satisfaction With Working Conditions. Frequencies and percentages were calculated to illustrate participant responses to each item. In addition, to calculate means and standard deviations for each item, responses were numerically coded according to the 4-point scale. No items were reverse-scored. Means could range anywhere from 1 to 4 with higher ratings indicating higher levels of satisfaction. Results of these calculations are displayed in *Table 2* with responses displayed for items related to perceptions of school leadership, workplace relationships, and job design. Overall, when rating items describing various working conditions, 66.7 to 88.9% of participants reported they were either "satisfied" or "very satisfied." Means ranged from 2.72 to 3.32. Results demonstrated that the majority of the school's teaching staff was satisfied with working conditions and experienced overall job satisfaction.

Quality of Work Experiences. Results for quality of work experiences were calculated similarly to those for satisfaction with working conditions. The majority of the teaching staff reported job satisfaction overall ($M = 3.02$, $SD = 0.73$). Only two respondents (4.4%) reported they were "very dissatisfied," and five (11.1%) reported they were "dissatisfied" with their jobs. Twenty-seven respondents (60.0%) reported they were "satisfied," and 10 (22.2%) reported to be "very satisfied" with their jobs. Additionally, mean occupational stress ratings for the school year were a moderate 2.80 ($SD = 0.73$) as 17 respondents (37.8%) reported mild stress levels, 19 (42.2%) reported moderate stress levels, and eight (17.8%) reported high stress levels. *Table 3* details other ratings for quality of work experience based on agreement with statements pertaining to teacher efficacy, interpersonal interactions, and job commitment. Similar to the working conditions satisfaction ratings, the majority of teaching personnel indicated agreement with the quality of their work experiences and intended to remain in their positions long term.

Relationship Between Job Satisfaction and Perceptions of Work Context. As teacher job satisfaction ultimately affects job performance and student outcomes (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Thapa et al., 2013), it is important to examine its relationships with the other perceptions in the workplace. *Table 4* lists Spearman's rho correlations that measured the degree to which overall job satisfaction was related to other item responses. Measures can range between −1.00 and 1.00 to demonstrate the strength and direction of these relationships.

Overall job satisfaction was strongly associated with most items pertaining to school leadership.

Table 3: Frequencies of participant ratings of quality of work experiences ($N = 45$)

	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Agree		Strongly agree		
Type of work experience	***n***	**(%)**	***n***	**(%)**	***n***	**(%)**	***n***	**(%)**	***M* (*SD*)**
Teacher efficacy									
I believe I am able to perform all the functions of my job.	1	(2.2)	0	(0.0)	21	(46.7)	23	(51.1)	3.47 (0.63)
My school's discipline policy allows me to manage student behaviors effectively	1	(2.2)	6	(13.3)	25	(55.6)	13	(28.9)	3.11 (0.71)
In my current school, workplace conditions allow me to provide high quality instruction to my students.*	2	(4.4)	9	(20.0)	25	(55.6)	8	(17.8)	2.89 (0.75)
With rare exception, I am present at work each day.*	0	(0.0)	0	(0.0)	17	(37.8)	27	(60.0)	3.61 (0.49)
I am confident in my ability to influence student outcomes.*	2	(4.4)	0	(0.0)	19	(42.2)	23	(51.1)	3.48 (0.59)
My students generally achieve their goals and objectives.	1	(2.2)	9	(20.0)	26	(57.8)	9	(20.0)	2.96 (0.71)
Quality of interpersonal interactions									
My interactions with school administrators are positive.	0	(0.0)	3	(6.7)	21	(46.7)	21	(46.7)	3.40 (0.62)
My interactions with other school personnel are positive.	2	(4.4)	5	(11.1)	20	(44.4)	17	(37.8)	3.49 (0.59)
My interactions with my students are positive.	0	(0.0)	2	(4.4)	19	(42.2)	24	(53.3)	3.51 (0.55)
My interactions with my student's parents or guardians are positive.**	0	(0.0)	2	(4.4)	23	(51.1)	16	(35.6)	3.51 (0.55)
Intention to remain in current position									
I chose to work at my current school (rather than transferred involuntarily or due to limited job options).	2	(4.4)	5	(11.1)	21	(46.7)	17	(37.8)	3.18 (0.81)
I intend to continue my employment in an alternative, special education, or nontraditional school, whether (with my current HNS) or another program, for years to come (or until retirement).	4	(8.9)	4	(8.9)	25	(55.6)	12	(26.7)	3.00 (0.85)
I intend to continue my employment (with my current HNS) for years to come (or until retirement).	7	(15.6)	2	(4.4)	24	(53.3)	12	(26.7)	2.91 (0.97)

* ($N = 44$);
** ($N = 41$).

Overall job satisfaction was strongly associated with most items pertaining to school leadership. For workplace relationships, although all correlations were significant, they were stronger for the items pertaining to relationships with administrators and colleagues than they were with parents and students. Higher job satisfaction was also associated with lower ratings of occupational stress and higher ratings of interpersonal interactions, teacher efficacy, and job commitment.

Table 4: Correlations between participant overall job satisfaction ratings and item responses

	Item	r_s	*p*
Working conditions			
School leadership	Support from administration in enforcing student discipline	.538	<.001**
	Support from administration that empowers me to perform my best on the job (e.g., constructive feedback, encouragement, advocacy)	.542	<.001**
	Level of autonomy allowed in my position	.397	.004**
	School-wide system for behavior management procedures for students	.593	<.001**
	Method of job performance evaluation	.489	<.001**
Workplace relationships	Relationships with school administrators	.526	<.001**
	Relationships with other school personnel (e.g., teachers, paraprofessionals)	.457	.001**
	Relationships with students	.255	.049*
	Relationships with students' parents or guardians	.331	.016*
Job design	Assigned workload	.396	.004**
	Amount of required paperwork	.433	.002**
	Availability of instructional resources (e.g., technology, supplies, textbooks)	.433	.002**
	My ongoing professional development opportunities	.444	.001**
	Amount of individual planning time available (not including department or collaborative planning)	.381	.006**
Occupational Stress	Please rate your overall stress level specific to your experience of workplace conditions.	− .359	.009**
Quality of work experience			
Teacher efficacy	I believe I am able to perform all the functions of my job.	.103	.254
	My school's discipline policy allows me to manage student behaviors effectively	.655	<.001**
	In my current school, workplace conditions allow me to provide high quality instruction to my students.	.631	<.001**
	With rare exception, I am present at work each day.	.317	.019*
	I am confident in my ability to influence student outcomes.	.282	.033*
	My students generally achieve their goals and objectives.	.515	<.001**
Quality of interpersonal interactions	My interactions with school administrators are positive.	.524	<.001**
	My interactions with other school personnel are positive.	.372	.006**
	My interactions with my students are positive.	.477	.001**
	My interactions with my student's parents or guardians are positive.	.477	.001**
Job commitment	I chose to work at my current school (rather than transferred involuntarily or due to limited job options).	.429	.002**
	I intend to continue my employment in an alternative, special education, or nontraditional school, whether (with my current HNS) or another program, for years to come (or until retirement).	.497	<.001**
	I intend to continue my employment (with my current HNS) for years to come (or until retirement).	.589	<.001**

* Significant correlation $p < .05$;
** Significant correlation $p < .01$.

Participant Demographics and Item Responses. Because there were a limited number of instructional personnel available in the school, the sample size in the current study is a limitation. Given such a limitation, to address potential demographic differences, a Fisher exact two-tailed test, which is commonly used to analyze cross-tabulations with populations of a similar size, was most appropriate for minimizing type I errors (McDonald, 2009). Scaled-response items were dichotomized to create a 2×2 model, which is commonly used with a Fisher exact test (McDonald, 2009). For example, the 4-point scale consisting of "very dissatisfied," "dissatisfied," "satisfied," or "very satisfied" was collapsed to reflect either "dissatisfied" or "satisfied." The occupational stress items as well as the other quality of work experience items were also dichotomized. Most demographic variables were already dichotomous and did not require collapsing (i.e., gender, role, program). However, years of experience (in K–12 settings, HNS, and the special education school) was regrouped by "0–5 years of experience" or "more than 5 years of experience" because retention and attrition research shows the first 5 years are critical in teachers' long-term career trajectory (Billingsley, 2010; Haynes, 2014; Owens, 2015).

Significant demographic differences were found for three items pertaining to working conditions and no items describing their quality of work experience. There was a significant gender difference ($p = .018$) in responses to the item, "Support from administration in enforcing student discipline." The 10 participants who reported dissatisfaction with this condition were females. Thirteen males (100.0%) and 19 females (65.5%), however, indicated they were satisfied. In addition, there were significant differences according to role ($p < .012$) and HNS experience ($p < .003$) for "relationships with students' parents or guardians." Seven respondents (35.0%) who identified as paraprofessionals with 0–5 years of experience in any HNS stated they were dissatisfied with these relationships, and all others reported satisfaction. Finally, there were significant differences in responses to "availability of instructional resources (e.g., technology, supplies, textbooks)" in years of work experience at the special education school ($p < .017$). There were 12 respondents (42.9%) with 0–5 years of experience but only one (6.7%) with more than 5 years of experience who reported dissatisfaction with this condition.

What Are the Implications for Special Education Leaders?

Currently, the prevailing sentiment in the education field is that teachers are largely unhappy and leaving their jobs (e.g., Owens, 2015; Richards, 2012), especially when working in HNS (e.g., Ingersoll et al., 2014). Although the present study has limited generalizability due to a small sample size and having been conducted within a single school, the results nonetheless give hope that special educators experience job satisfaction and enjoy a high quality of work experiences provided they are satisfied with their working conditions. Furthermore, findings are consistent with other studies in HNS (e.g., Simon & Johnson, 2015) that demonstrated associations between job satisfaction and perceptions of work context.

Although the present study has limited generalizability due to a small sample size and having been conducted within a single school, the results nonetheless give hope that special educators experience job satisfaction and enjoy a high quality of work experiences provided they are satisfied with their working conditions.

Leadership Matters. Results imply that teacher perceptions of administration have a tremendous influence on their job satisfaction. These correlations supported previous findings (e.g., Robinson et al., 2017; Stewart-Banks et al., 2015) that emphasized the importance of administrative presence and support for enforcing student behaviors, providing constructive feedback, fair evaluations, and allowing teacher autonomy. Thus, effective leadership appears to be a prerequisite to positive work contexts as, without it, educators cannot experience the conditions that allow them to be effective in their roles.

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Collegial Support Matters as Well. Significant correlations were found between satisfaction with workplace relationships and overall job satisfaction. However, the correlations regarding relationships with students and parents were not as strong as those involving school administrators and colleagues. This has two important implications. First, these results are a testament to the role of workplace relationships in job satisfaction. Moreover, based on participant ratings of their relationships with students and their parents, which had higher means than overall job satisfaction, it appears that some of the teaching staff may have positive teacher–student and teacher–parent relationships regardless of dissatisfaction with other aspects of their jobs. This supports previous suggestions (e.g., Simon & Johnson, 2015) that student issues may not be the primary reason for HNS teacher attrition. Thus, the relationships teachers have with their administrators and each other may be the difference between staying at or leaving their current schools.

Job Design Matters but Not as Much as Administrative Support and Workplace Relationships. Ratings of working conditions pertaining to job design were associated with overall job satisfaction but not at the same level of significance as perceptions of leadership and relationships. Researchers (e.g., Greenlee & Brown, 2009; Robinson et al., 2017) have suggested that teachers are more satisfied when their jobs consist of manageable workloads, professional development opportunities, adequate instructional resources, and time allotted for individual and collaborative planning. All of these issues are at least partially influenced by leadership practices. Survey results reflect previous findings and suggest that school leaders should be conscientious of their teachers' job design, particularly the conditions within their control. However, perceptions of their leadership and relationships with administrators and colleagues may have greater impact on their satisfaction at work.

Those Happier on the Job Also Tend to Experience Less Stress, Have Better Interactions With Others, and Be More Likely to Stay. Higher job satisfaction was associated with lower ratings of occupational stress and higher ratings of interpersonal interactions and job commitment. These results are consistent with previous research as higher levels of teacher stress have not only been associated with job dissatisfaction, but have also been associated with negative interpersonal interactions and lower job commitment (Borman & Dowling, 2008; Robinson et al., 2017). While on the job, higher stress levels often hinder teacher performance as occupational stress is also associated with illness, absenteeism, and less likelihood to utilize effective instructional and behavior management practices (Greenberg, Brown, & Abenavoli, 2016). These job performance problems adversely affect workplace relationships, school climate, and student outcomes (Thapa et al., 2013). In addition, teachers with higher job stress often leave their positions, thereby creating problematic vacancies (Billingsley, 2004; Grayson & Alvarez, 2008; Owens, 2015). Thus, cultivating work contexts associated with job satisfaction may go a long way toward preserving teacher health, collaboration, and career longevity.

By Cultivating Positive Work Contexts, Administrators Empower Special Educators to Do Their Best Work With Students. Most teacher efficacy items were significantly related to job satisfaction. The only exception involved an item related to teacher efficacy ("I believe I am able to perform all the functions of my job."). The relationships between teacher efficacy items and job satisfaction have important implications for work context. Although participant job satisfaction was not associated with their perceptions of performing job functions, it was associated with "I am confident in my ability to influence student outcomes," and "My students generally achieve their goals and objectives." The mean rating for their students' achievement was much lower than participants' ratings of their abilities. Thus, those who disagreed with this statement apparently attributed their students' underachievement to factors unrelated to their role as educators. Although this may suggest that some teachers overrated their performance, it may suggest that a positive work context is necessary for teachers to be effective. Job satisfaction was related to perceptions of student achievement, and it was associated with working conditions. Those who reported lower job satisfaction and student achievement also reported dissatisfaction with working conditions. These findings lend further

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support to suggestions (e.g., Haynes, 2014; Thapa et al., 2013) that work context not only matters to teachers, but it is associated with student outcomes as well.

Novices Need Additional Support. With three exceptions, there were no significant differences in responses according to demographic variables. First, a significant difference was found for "support from administration in enforcing student discipline" between gender groups. All who reported dissatisfaction with this condition identified as female ($n = 10$). However, given that more of the female respondents reported satisfaction with this condition ($n = 19$), it is challenging to speculate the reasons for this difference.

Inexperience, however, seemed to influence participant perceptions. There was a significant difference between role and HNS experience for "relationships with students' parents or guardians." Those who reported dissatisfaction were paraprofessionals with 5 or fewer years of experience in HNS. This suggests there may be a need for specific training and mentoring on parent and guardian relationships for new paraprofessionals. Depending on their professional backgrounds, it is plausible they may not have much experience building and maintaining relationships with caretakers or even know what to expect. Furthermore, there was a difference for "availability of instructional resources (e.g., technology, supplies, textbooks)" according to years of experience at the specific school. Teachers and paraprofessionals who reported dissatisfaction tended to have less experience. One plausible explanation is that less experienced teaching personnel may not be familiar with all instructional resources available to them. Even if they are, they may not know how to best utilize them. They may also have different expectations regarding resources and what they would like to have available. Another explanation is that veteran teachers may be accustomed to working with fewer instructional resources.

What Are the Recommendations for Special Education Leaders?

As enthusiastic and engaged teachers are critical to the success of students in HNS (Haynes, 2014; Simon & Johnson, 2015; Thapa et al., 2013), school leaders must make positive work context a priority. Overall, results suggest this school has an appealing work context for most respondents and is staffed mostly with educators satisfied with their jobs. Therefore, the following recommendations are provided with considerations.

People First. Perhaps the single most important thing school leaders can do is build and maintain positive working relationships with their staff.

People First. Perhaps the single most important thing school leaders can do is build and maintain positive working relationships with their staff. Prioritizing workplace relationships has been associated with favorable outcomes relevant to school climate, student behavior, and job commitment and engagement (e.g., Grayson & Alvarez, 2008; Robinson et al., 2017; Thapa et al., 2013). Administrators can foster positive relationships through clear and frequent communication regarding the matters that affect their teachers. Likewise, teachers and other personnel may feel more comfortable approaching administrators who communicate effectively and value their input. Administrators can foster this dynamic through high visibility around the school, frequent visits to all classrooms, and encouragement to discuss school matters with them. Furthermore, teacher feedback and evaluations should be provided constructively to promote continuous professional growth (Petty et al., 2012) rather than threaten the status of their jobs.

For collegial relationships, mutual encouragement and collaboration contributes to a positive work context (Simon & Johnson, 2015). For starters, administrators may foster supportive workplace relationships by modeling the positive interpersonal behaviors and dynamics expected of personnel (Greenlee & Brown, 2009; Stewart-Banks et al., 2015). In addition, school leaders may create opportunities that support a positive and cooperative dynamic, such as common planning time,

professional learning communities, and team-building activities. Cultivating a collaborative culture may boost productivity and morale while minimizing burnout and conflict among educators. This type of work context supports teachers in planning activities together, sharing resources and expertise, and fosters a cooperative dynamic rather than a competitive one.

Know the Power They Hold to Influence the Work Context. School administrators may not have complete control over factors teachers commonly report as sources of job dissatisfaction, such as legislative mandates and salaries (Owens, 2015; Richards, 2012). However, many aspects within their control most strongly determine their teaching staff's job satisfaction, job performance, and job commitment (Robinson et al., 2017; Simon & Johnson, 2015; Stewart-Banks et al., 2015). For example, effective leaders solicit staff input when possible for issues such as implementing school-wide initiatives and acquiring instructional resources. Effective leaders may also assign fair workloads based on the staff's strengths, weaknesses, areas of expertise, and professional experience. Another aspect within an administrator's control is consistent enforcement of student behaviors and faculty expectations. Norms, expectations, and boundaries for these conditions are influenced by administrative behaviors. For teaching staff to deliver effective instruction, demonstrate professional conduct, and manage student behaviors, they need effective leaders who support them.

Awareness of the Critical Importance of Work Context in HNS. The recommendations for practice may apply to administrators in any educational setting. However, cultivating a positive work context is especially important when serving students whose education must be a game-changer if their educational outcomes are to improve substantially. Without an education that substantially influences the negative experiences of students (e.g., academic underachievement, disciplinary actions), the chances of positive long-term outcomes are considerably diminished (Ronfeldt et al., 2013). HNS should be led by administrators who foster satisfactory working conditions that lead to high-quality work experiences for teaching staff (Borman & Dowling, 2008; Grayson & Alvarez, 2008; Greenlee & Brown, 2009; Robinson et al., 2017; Simon & Johnson, 2015; Stewart-Banks et al., 2015). By setting a supportive tone as a leader, school personnel will be more likely to follow with their own positive contributions to the school environment (Stewart-Banks et al., 2015). The positive work context school leaders initially create also cultivates a school climate that attracts and retains a strong teaching staff and ultimately promotes positive student outcomes (Simon & Johnson, 2015; Thapa et al., 2013).

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