Teacher Turnover in Central Pennsylvania: What Can School Districts and Principals Do to Promote Teacher Retention?

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Dedication

This doctoral work is dedicated to the children in my hometown, especially those who face the steepest challenges, the overlooked, and the underestimated. Though you may come from humble beginnings, you can accomplish your dreams with self-belief, self-discipline, and resiliency. Please know that ordinary, small-town people can do extraordinary things!

For the teachers I lead. To me, there is no more noble calling than the education of our youth. May I be the leader you both need and deserve.

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Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

Abstract

Traditionally, teacher turnover rates remained low in central Pennsylvania, but since the Covid 19 Pandemic, early-career attrition rates have increased drastically. This has coincided with less new teachers being certified, which has added to a teacher shortage in the region. This study seeks to find answers as to why teachers are leaving schools and what can be done about it out through the eyes of teachers. This mixed methods study uses a survey, a focus group, and interviews to gather opinions from teachers based on the following research questions. What are the main reasons teachers want to leave public schools in central Pennsylvania, and how does this compare or contrast with the researcher's own school district? What working conditions promote teacher retention? What forms of support do teachers need from principals to promote retention? The survey encompasses the opinions of 132 participants across six school districts. The focus group gathers opinions from current teachers in the researcher's own district. The interviews gather information from seven teachers who have left the researcher's own district. These data tools provide multi-faceted perspectives on teacher turnover and what can be done about it. In the study, participants pointed to low salaries and frustrations with leadership and the profession itself as main reasons for high turnover rates; however, teachers shared a number of solutions, including raising salaries, supporting teachers on student discipline, and reducing non-instructional duties. Based on this evidence, recommendations are provided for school districts and principals to improve teacher retention.

CHAPTER I

Introduction

Teacher turnover has surfaced as a major issue for schools across the nation over the past several years since the Covid 19 Pandemic. Valenzuela et al. (2022, para. 1) reports, "Approximately 10% of teachers leave within their first year, and 44% leave within five years." Like the rest of the nation, central Pennsylvania has also seen marked increases in teacher turnover rates in recent years. The researcher was first hired as a teacher in a small, rural school district in Huntingdon County, Pennsylvania in 2004. At that time, it was very difficult to obtain a teaching job, and once people accepted a job, many stayed in that same position for several years or until retirement. Twenty years later that landscape has changed significantly, and the teaching profession is struggling mightily. Not only are more teachers leaving the profession but less are entering the profession altogether. In 2021, nearly 10,000 less teaching certificates were issued than in 2011 (Fuller, 2022). Immediate changes must be made to foster teacher retention, or the quality of public education in Pennsylvania will see a dramatic decline.

Background

The researcher's first role as an administrator was as an assistant principal in a large, urban school district in Blair County. The teaching staff at that school district was transient, and it seemed like high attrition rates were due to elements exclusive to that community. In 2020-2021 at the height of the Covid 19 Pandemic, this researcher was hired as principal of the middle school in his hometown. During the first two years of this principalship, most of the middle school faculty was retained, but several elementary staff members left the district. Initially, it seemed like this phenomenon was exclusive to

that building alone, but in the following years, the pattern began to spread to other district schools. After the 2022-2023 school year, six teachers from the middle school staff left, which equated to approximately 20% of the teaching staff in a building with 32 teachers. Even the high school faculty within this district, which traditionally maintained a veteran staff, lost several teachers after the 2022-23 school year. After the completion of the 2023-2024 school year, six more teachers left the middle school for employment outside of the district. Replacing large numbers of new staff each year has placed great strain on the researcher's school district and has inspired teacher turnover as a topic for action research.

Teacher attrition and retention problems are worth researching and solving for a variety of reasons. For starters, it is difficult to recruit, hire, and replace teachers every year. It takes time and money, and less certified teachers are available to fill these positions. Replacing new teachers can cost upwards of $10,000 for small, rural districts and $20,000 for large, urban districts (Gerald, 2019). Even with these high costs, districts often cannot fill these positions or must settle for unqualified teachers. It is estimated that 82,000 teachers are under-qualified across the country (Gerald, 2019). What's more, this constant change in staff places strain on the entire school system. New teachers need to be trained and mentored, and it is very difficult to build consistency with a revolving door of faculty. The high turnover rate negatively impacts staff morale. When teachers see their colleagues leaving, they begin to question their own role within the district. Some even begin to question district leadership and argue that the district is not doing enough to retain teachers. Nationally, this has led to an estimated 15% decline in teacher job satisfaction over the past decade, and a 12% increase in those who say they

want to leave the profession altogether (Gerald, 2019). Ultimately, the impacts of teacher turnover are multi-faceted and reverberate across all levels of the district community, including students, teachers, administrators, and community members.

Capstone Focus

Through this research project, the researcher hopes to gain insight as to what school district leaders can do to improve teacher retention rates. The focus will be to research what factors are causing teachers to leave traditional, brick and mortar public schools in central Pennsylvania. These areas may include public schools within Blair County as well as other districts near Blair County. As the research questions below demonstrate, the researcher wants to explore why teachers want to leave traditional public school teaching positions and what districts can do to avoid large-scale teacher attrition. Finally, the impact of principal leadership on teacher retention will be analyzed. The goal will be to provide school leaders with practical knowledge of how to avoid large-scale teacher attrition and promote teacher retention through best practices in educational leadership.

Research Questions

1. What are the main reasons teachers want to leave public schools in central Pennsylvania, and how does this compare or contrast with the researcher's own school district?

2. What working conditions promote teacher retention?

3. What forms of support do teachers need from principals to promote retention?

Expected Outcomes

Teachers are leaving public schools in central Pennsylvania, and while district and school leaders may have an idea of why this is occurring, it is imperative to listen to teachers' perspectives to gain a broader understanding of the issue. Hughes et al. (2014) found that principals in hard-to-staff schools reported offering high levels of teacher support while their teachers reported inadequate support. Therefore, one major goal of this study is to bridge the gap between why administrators perceive teachers are leaving versus why teachers actually are leaving. After surveying teachers and listening to their perspectives through focus groups and interviews, recommendations for teacher retention will be applied to the researcher's local school district. This study and its recommendations will be shared with district-level administration to inform them of options that can promote retention. District-level leaders negotiate contracts with teachers and create policies that impact teachers throughout a district. A deeper understanding of why faculty are leaving will provide district-level leaders with information to guide their decision-making toward policies and contracts that will promote teacher retention.

Another goal of this study is to provide guidance to principals on how they can better support teachers through their leadership. The information gained from this study will provide valuable information for school principals, who directly supervise teachers. Teachers often cite the climate of their school and their relationship with their principal as reasons for leaving. This study will provide the researcher and his colleagues with insight into leadership styles and school climate practices that promote teacher retention. Finally, information and insights from this study can be shared with other school districts in central Pennsylvania to help guide their policies and practices.

Fiscal Implications

The financial impact of teacher turnover is difficult to quantify. Often, new teachers make less than experienced teachers, so when experienced teachers leave, the district may initially save money. However, the indirect human and emotional costs associated with teacher attrition are substantial, and solving this issue will be impactful. In addition to the human costs mentioned, further costs can reverberate throughout a school district and community when students' learning goals are not being met, and the school district must pay out more money to improve upon inadequate instruction.

Traditionally, teachers cite low salaries as a reason for leaving the teaching profession. High inflation rates and rising college costs further exacerbate the issue of low salaries. School districts may need to consider raising salaries in order to keep veteran teachers. For this reason, the financial implications can be extensive, especially since the largest portion of any district budget is allocated to employee salaries. Aside from the financial impact of hiring new teachers initially, new hires may need more support in the form of professional development, mentoring, and induction programs. These programs are all associated with increased costs for local districts. Purchasing more resources and improving security features are other measures that could come at a cost for school districts. It is difficult to predict all of the potential measures a district will need to implement for promoting teacher retention.

If one thing is certain, it is that more money leads to improved outcomes. Baker (2017) explains that higher teacher wages are associated with higher student achievement levels due to the retention and recruitment of more capable staff. He goes onto explain that states with higher per pupil funding levels have higher achievement levels (Baker,

2017). Therefore, school districts will undoubtedly see increased costs if they are serious about promoting the retention of quality teachers and improving outcomes for students.

Summary

The inspiration for this research is based on 20 years of experience in the educational field. Teachers are leaving public school districts in central Pennsylvania and the researcher's own district in record numbers. This has made it increasingly difficult for district leaders and building principals to staff and lead schools. Hiring and training new teachers each year takes time, effort, and money. Additionally, turnover hurts the climate and morale in schools where high rates of teachers are in flux each year. When teachers leave in large numbers, those who stay begin to question the efficacy of the entire system in which they work. This fuels a distrust in leadership leading to more turnover.

The goal of this study is to gain a deeper understanding of why teachers are leaving public schools in central Pennsylvania in Blair and surrounding counties. This information will allow the researcher to make recommendations that can be used by both district-level and building-level leaders to promote teacher retention. District-level leaders can use this information to create policies and negotiate contracts favorable to retaining high-quality teachers. School principals can benefit from learning what leadership styles, supports, and practices are needed to promote teacher retention. Prior to studying the problem at a local level, it is pivotal to take a look at the overall body of research on this topic in order to gain a deeper understanding of the larger trends related to teacher retention.

CHAPTER II

Review of Literature

Teacher turnover has become a major challenge for schools across the country, and more recently it has become an issue in Pennsylvania due to the overall teacher shortage. In fact, teacher attrition accounts for nearly 90% of annual teacher demand and less than one-third of attrition comes from retirements (Sutcher et al., 2019). When teachers leave, it puts a strain on the entire school system. Administration must work to hire and train new staff, and the teachers who remain must take on more duties. All of this takes time, money, and effort, and meanwhile students receive less high-quality instruction. What's more, an unprecedentedly large Baby Boomer retirement group, the Covid 19 Pandemic, and less young people entering the profession have all added to these challenges. This review of literature delves into the overall impact of teacher attrition, its main causes and characteristics, and what can be done to promote the retention of teachers in our schools.

Attrition by the Numbers

Teacher attrition is an international, national, and state phenomenon. Countries with well-paid, well-respected teachers like Finland and Singapore have attrition rates as low as 5% (Ingersoll et al., 2018). Other European countries like Germany, France, and the Netherlands also see low attrition rates (Shell et al., 2023). By contrast, the United States and many other countries across the globe, including the United Kingdom, see much higher rates of attrition. Shell et al. (2023) explained that the U.S. can see rates as high as 20% annually, while the United Kingdom sees rates as high as 50%. Ingersoll et

al. (2018) further expounded that 45% of United States teachers leave within their first five years of teaching.

Attrition Rates in the United States

The attrition rates within the United States vary by region. The highest attrition rates are in the southern states at nearly 17%, while the lowest rates are under 10% in the northeast (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019). Attrition rates seem to be highest in urban centers and suburbs, specifically in areas with high poverty rates and high minority populations. Title I schools often see the highest turnover rates (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019). Title I schools support buildings with more than 40% low socioeconomic rates to support reading, language arts, and mathematics (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2024). Plus, teachers are 46% more likely to migrate away from schools with high populations of Hispanic and African American students (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019). By contrast, teachers are more likely to stay in schools with high populations of Caucasian and Asian students (Nguyen, 2021).

Attrition Rates by Certification Area

Attrition rates vary by certification area as well. Math, science, foreign language, English Language Learner (ELL), and special education instructors have higher turnover rates. Math, science, and foreign language teachers can often find higher-paying jobs in industry, while ELL and special education teachers more commonly leave the profession due to the unique challenges of their roles (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019). Researchers in the early 2000s found that special education attrition rates were particularly higher than regular education teachers due to the high levels of paperwork

and challenging clientele (Boe et al., 2008). Math, science, and foreign language have all shown the lowest rates of new teachers obtaining certification in Pennsylvania, which only adds to the problem of staffing (Fuller, 2022).

Attrition Rates in Pennsylvania Schools

In Pennsylvania, certain types of public schools show higher turnover rates than others. Charter schools consistently show higher turnover rates than public schools. Fuller (2022) showed that Pennsylvania charter school teachers quit at twice the rate of teachers in public schools, with 38% quitting after their third year. Public middle schools, in particular, seemed to have higher rates of attrition, which led to more staffing difficulties. "More than one out of every five middle school teachers employed in the quintile of schools with the greatest percentage of students living in poverty had three or fewer years of teaching experience" (Fuller, 2022, p. 16). That figure was one in four for middle schools with high percentages of minority students (Fuller, 2022).

Schools across the globe have problems keeping teachers. While some countries show high levels of retention, many developed and undeveloped countries struggle to keep teachers. Certain regions in the United States display higher rates of attrition than others, and poor, urban areas tend to see the highest rates. Furthermore, certain certification areas and school types show higher attrition rates than others. Nationally, math, science, foreign language, special education, and ELL teachers leave at the highest rates. Charter schools, middle schools, high-poverty schools, and high-minority schools show the highest rates of attrition on average in Pennsylvania.

The Impact of Teacher Turnover

When teachers leave a school, there are a wide range of impacts that follow. In describing teacher turnover, the terms attrition and turnover will be used interchangeably for this study, but there are two noted types of attrition: teachers who move schools and teachers who leave the profession altogether. Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2019) report that the national attrition rate is 16%, with half of those teachers leaving the profession entirely, and the other half moving to different schools to continue teaching. Recent research has shown that attrition rates have been on the rise nationally, and in Pennsylvania specifically, since the Covid 19 Pandemic. Traditionally, the attrition rate in Pennsylvania has stood at roughly 6.2% (Fuller, 2022). However, from the 2021-2022 school year to the 2022-2023 school year, the attrition rate in Pennsylvania rose sharply to 7.7%, which amounted to 9,587 teachers total, the largest number on record (Fuller, 2023). This sharp increase may be attributed to the lasting impacts of the Covid 19 Pandemic, which is covered later in this chapter. All the while, less new teachers are being certified than ever before, creating unprecedented staffing issues in Pennsylvania (Fuller, 2023).

Teacher Turnover Impacts Teacher Quality

When experienced teachers leave, the quality of instruction typically declines at least for a short time period. Quality instruction has been consistently cited as the most important school-based factor in promoting student achievement. In the late 1990's and early 2000's, several studies showed that teacher quality was the number one determinant in student achievement, and that having a high-quality teacher alone could increase achievement by as much as one grade level (Rice, 2003). In fact, Rivkin et al. (2005) reviewed data from approximately 1.5 million students in 3,000 schools and found that

teacher quality outweighed other factors like total spending and class sizes in promoting student achievement. A later study stated that, "Turnover adversely affects the quality of instruction in lower achievement schools" (Hanushek et al., 2016, p. 145). And finally, a more recent study in 2021 found that students score less well in their final assessments when they have been exposed to a new teacher in that subject area (Gibbons, et al., 2021).

As with any profession, it takes time to become a good teacher, and when teachers leave early in their career, they never get a chance to blossom into the great teacher our students deserve. Clement (2016) explains that teachers greatly increase their effectiveness between their first and second years, and teachers who stay at least five years are the most effective. Unfortunately, many teachers leave before their fifth year. Shaw and Newton (2014) noted that it takes three to seven years to become a high-quality teacher, and that approximately one-third will leave the profession within the first five years. High-quality teachers know their content well, understand teaching methods (pedagogy), and make connections with their students (Park et al., 2017).   Although experience does not necessarily translate into teacher effectiveness, several studies have shown that experience has an overall positive correlation with teacher effectiveness (Rice, 2003). In Pennsylvania, the highest attrition rates continue to be for retiring teachers serving thirty years or more, who are leaving behind a wealth of experience. Meanwhile, the next highest group leaving the profession are new teachers with three years or less years of experience. This group includes 11.3% of Pennsylvania public-school teachers, who left after their first year from 2012-2018 (Fuller, 2022). This means that many teachers do not stay in the classroom long enough to become seasoned, high-quality teachers with knowledge of content, pedagogy, and students.

The Cost of Teacher Attrition

Replacing teachers comes with a high price tag. Evers-Gerdes and Siegle (2021) put that national price tag at $2.2 billion dollars annually. This results in approximately $1 billion in state expenditures across the United States (Harris et al., 2019).   The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future estimates the average cost of replacing a teacher at the district level to be $17,862 (Ryan et al., 2017). While the cost is likely lower for some rural districts at closer to $9,000, it can be as high as $21,000 for urban districts (Carver-Thomas, 2017). While these are all merely averages and predictions, the costs associated with advertising, hiring, onboarding, and mentoring come with high price tags. These costs vary in different parts of the country, but most studies place that the national average consistently around $17,000 (Tran et al., 2023). Hiring and mentoring represent direct costs, but the indirect costs associated with the extra time and effort it takes to train new teachers are difficult to measure.

Finding Qualified Teachers

In addition to the high costs, districts sometimes struggle to find qualified teachers. This problem has been exacerbated by fewer new teachers entering the profession. From 2009 to 2014, teacher education enrollments dropped by a 35% reduction from 691,000 to 451,000 (Sutcher et al., 2016). Fuller (2022) explained that Pennsylvania saw a 60% decline in students in teacher preparation programs from 2009-2020. Shell et al. (2013) shared that schools often hire substitutes or temporary teachers with little experience when experienced teachers leave. In Pennsylvania, nearly 6,000 teachers were hired on an emergency certificate during the 2020-2021 school year, which is up from 1,845 in 2010-11 (Fuller, 2022). For the first time on record, the number of

newly certified teachers was less than the number of teachers working on emergency certificates (Fuller, 2022). The issue of hiring highly qualified teachers rings especially true in hard-to-staff areas like math, science, special education, and ELL instruction (Fuller, 2022). "The declines over time and very low ratios strongly suggest the pool of prospective teachers from which districts hire beginning teachers has become too small to meet the demand for beginning teachers" (Fuller, 2022, p. 9). Furthermore, once uncertified, novice teachers are hired, districts must provide them with training. This training represents another cost increase that may or may not pay dividends if the teacher does not remain in the school.

Teacher Turnover Impacts an Entire School

The impact of teachers leaving a school is not limited to a single classroom or hallway but has been shown to have an impact on entire schools. For students, teachers, and administrators alike, it is difficult to build continuity from one school year to the next when staff needs to be replaced each year. Ronfeldt et al. (2013) explain that turnover harms students even in classes with teachers who remain in a particular school. Reviewing data from over 1.1 million fourth and fifth-grade students in New York City over a ten-year period, these researchers found that students scored lower in both reading and math in grade levels with higher turnover rates. Plus, the negative impact of turnover was increasingly strong in schools with high poverty rates and high minority populations (Ronfeldt et al., 2013).

When experienced teachers leave a school, they take with them institutional knowledge, which helps a school function efficiently. "Turnover adversely affects the quality of instruction in lower achievement schools. This result is due to a turnover-

induced loss of general and grade-specific experience" (Hanushek et al., 2016, p. 145).

In addition to a loss of institutional knowledge, when buildings are dealing with high

turnover, it often results in teachers shifting grade levels, programs being cut, or larger

class sizes (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019). All of these measures hamper

continuity and collaboration, which places strain on schools. Extensive research has

shown that high turnover rates negatively impact collaboration, which in turn, impacts the

overall environment of the school (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019). Evers-

Gerdes and Siegle (2021) explain that collective efficacy is an important concept,

wherein teachers feel like they can overcome challenges together to support students.

"When teachers believe in their collective capabilities, they stay in their schools" (Evers-

Gerdes & Siegle, 2021, p. 63). In sum, research supports that when teachers perceive a

positive school climate, they are more likely to remain teaching, and this is more likely to

support the achievement of the entire school.

Positive Impacts of Teacher Attrition

Some research has shed light on the positive impacts of teacher attrition,

especially when low-performing or negative-minded teachers leave a school. Looking at

schools in Texas, Hanushek et al. (2016) noted that while there are some benefits to poor

teachers leaving, the impact was not great enough to make up for the overall negative

impact of teacher turnover. Adnot et al. (2017) found that teacher turnover actually had a

positive impact on student achievement in District of Columbia schools. The study found

that when low-performing teachers left, student achievement increased in math and

reading. The study also found that the exit of highly rated teachers had a negative impact

on student achievement, but that impact was minimal (Adnot et. al., 2017).

Positive benefits have been noted for teachers who leave who have negative attitudes. These negative attitudes do not support a positive school culture, which can negatively impact teacher collaboration and student achievement. Teachers are more likely to stay when they have positive perceptions of school, supportive colleagues, and a supportive principal (Kullar & Cunningham, 2019). Clement (2016) noted that negative teachers who become ringleaders can be dangerous for a school climate. She went on to state that "the nonrenewal of a contract for certain teachers may actually raise the morale of those remaining" (Clement, 2016, p. 88).

Teacher attrition has a negative impact on student achievement, school finances, and school climate, but this must be balanced with the evidence that shows a positive correlation when low-performing teachers leave.

Reasons for Attrition

A variety of reasons have been listed as causing teacher attrition. The most commonly listed reasons for teacher attrition are low salary, lack of administrative support, and a negative school climate. According to one author, "Cash and culture are two factors that retain teachers—especially effective ones" (Clement, 2016, p. 82). This section delves into the literature on why teachers choose to leave the profession.

Compensation

Compensation is listed as a factor in almost every teacher attrition study. Recent numbers shed light on the markedly low wages teachers earn when compared with other professions. A recent article published by the Economic Policy Institute shows that teachers make 26.6% less on average than other comparable college graduates (Allegretto, 2024). This is coupled with the fact that the average student borrows over $30,000 to obtain a bachelor's degree, which can take more than 20 years to pay off

(Hanson, 2024). While teachers typically receive strong benefits packages, like healthcare, time off, and a pension plan, this benefit advantage may not be enough to offset the costs of the wage gap (Allegretto, 2024).   Harris et al. (2019) surveyed over 2,000 teachers in one western state, and 93% percent of respondents listed salary as a major factor in wanting to quit teaching.

Although low salary is one of the most popularly listed causes of attrition, it is not always seen as the main factor. When most teachers enter the profession, they understand that they are not going to be the highest earners. Many teachers go into the profession wanting to help students and benefit society, but when they are confronted with heavy workloads, disrespect, and a lack of support, these low wages become harder to justify. Hughes (2012) explained it more clearly, "Teachers' dissatisfaction with salary is exasperated by increased workloads without increased salaries" (p. 247). Moreover, noticeable salary gaps often exist between high-performing, affluent schools and high poverty schools. Inadequate compensation can lead to dissatisfaction and prompt teachers to seek better paying jobs elsewhere (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019). Finally, Tompkins (2023) found that new teachers listed pay and benefits as a significant factor in whether or not they considered leaving the profession. Those who felt unprepared and unsupported were more likely to leave the profession, especially when compensation was deemed inadequate. In sum, compensation is a common and important factor in teacher attrition, but the research has shown that it is normally paired with other factors when teachers choose to leave teaching.

Administrative and Collegial Support

Compensation is only one small part of the reason why teachers may choose to leave a school or the profession entirely. Becker and Grob (2021) explained that teachers make a cost-benefit analysis when deciding to leave by comparing the amount of money they make with how much support they receive and if they like their job. Thus, lack of administrative and collegial support are very important factors in teacher attrition. Looking at data going back as far as the 90s and early 2000s, researchers found that better preparation and support for new teachers could help reduce turnover. One particular study out of New York found that the highest-ranking reason for teachers leaving after their first year was dissatisfaction with administration, and a close second was discipline support (Boyd, et al., 2011). Other researchers noted that improved support from a principal could help teachers overcome feelings of stress and isolation (Boe et al., 2008).   Hughes (2012) added to that research by showing that teachers were more likely to stay when they felt like their colleagues and principal believed in them. In Hughes' study, teachers listed principal support on student discipline as second only to salaries as a main factor for teachers wanting to leave the profession. Later, Nguyen (2021) added to the literature by explaining that teachers who feel more supported from their administration through resources, guidance, and encouragement are less likely to leave teaching. Finally, some very recent literature shows that principal leadership is one of the most important predictors of teacher attrition, and that teachers value principals who support them in student discipline, build trust, act fairly, and involve them in decision-making (Shell et al., 2023).

Administrators can play a key role in reducing workloads for new teachers. Much of the research shows a disconnect between why teachers leave and why principals "think" they leave. For example, one of the most highly predictive factors for attrition is that work expectations are overwhelming (Harris et al., 2019). Helping teachers navigate the bureaucracy of the school and large amounts of paperwork are key functions of principal support. "The best principals provide protection from excessive stress, enabling teachers to do their jobs in a less threatening environment" (Fiore & Whitaker, 2004, p. 37).

Mentoring and Induction

Another distinct type of support comes from a teacher's mentor and induction program. Dating back to 2003, Ingersoll and Smith found that upwards of 40% of teachers leave without a formal induction process versus only 18% who experience a robust induction process. A separate study of over 2,000 new teachers in California showed that new teachers feel large amounts of stress. This study showed that when teachers found their induction and mentoring programs to be positive experiences, they felt less stress and were more likely to continue teaching (Tompkins, 2023). Unfortunately, many new teachers often state that their mentor and induction programs are inadequate and are not supportive. Some new teachers consider them a burden. "Teachers routinely stated that their induction and mentorship program was not only unhelpful, but even an additional burden" (Tompkins, 2023, p. 32). It is unfortunate that mentoring and induction programs that are designed to help teachers actually do the opposite. What's more, schools should be very wary of moving teacher assignments before teachers are comfortable in their roles. Ost and Schiman (2015) found that teachers who teach the same grade in their first two years are 20% more likely to stay.

Until their sixth year, teachers are more likely to leave teaching if reassigned to a new grade level. This shows that in addition to mentoring, continuity helps build more confidence and skills in early-career educators.

Focus on Standardized Tests and Stress

While compensation and support are the most frequently listed causes of teacher attrition, there is a growing body of research showing that an unhealthy focus on standardized testing is a growing factor in attrition. Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2017) surveyed over 700 middle and elementary teachers in Norway. They found that a supportive learning environment can enhance teachers' motivation to stay in the profession, but that an unhealthy focus on achievement increases stress and teachers' desire to leave. Ryan et al. (2017) found the same results when looking at the impact of standardized testing policies on over 1800 teachers in Maryland, Connecticut, and Pennsylvania. Notably, this study found that test-based accountability policies at the state level predicted higher rates of stress and burnout among teachers and an increased drive to leave the profession (Ryan et al., 2017). A more recent journal article built off this knowledge base. It showed that 30% of teachers have experienced clinically significant anxiety because of state testing policies (Farmer, 2020). This stress was caused by overwhelming expectations to collect and analyze large amounts of data, excessively long work hours, and a lack of a healthy-work life balance (Farmer, 2020). This unhealthy focus on testing alone led to challenging relationships in the workplace, burnout, and compassion fatigue (Farmer, 2020).

An unhealthy focus on achievement and standardized testing are not solely to blame for stress and burnout. Unreasonable expectations from administrators and

unhealthy work environments add to stress and desires to leave teaching. Madigan and

Kim (2021) performed a meta-analysis reviewing 24 studies on teacher stress and

burnout. They explained that burnout has three dimensions—exhaustion,

depersonalization, and reduced accomplishment—all of which showed a significant

relationship with teachers' intention to quit the profession (Madigan & Kim, 2021).

These researchers went on to explain that burnout teachers are more likely to leave now

than ever, and that burnout is a better predictor of attrition than job satisfaction is of

retention (Madigan & Kim, 2021). "Stress is one of the clearest predictors of teacher

attrition" (Ryan et al., 2017, p. 3). Stress impacts job satisfaction, performance, physical

and emotional health, work-life balance, and relationships with colleagues (Tompkins,

2023).

Covid 19

Covid 19 is a markedly new, yet major cause of teacher attrition. The Covid 19

Pandemic changed the entire landscape of education in March 2020, and the profession,

as a whole, is still seeing the impacts of this event on students and staffing. A 2021 study

showed that half of all public-school teachers who left the profession cited Covid 19 as

one of their reasons for leaving (Diliberti et al., 2021). Goldhaber and Theobald (2022)

looked at teacher data from Washington state over the past 37 years. They found that

attrition initially dropped during the 2019-2020 school year because of concerns over the

economy.   Historically, teacher attrition slows during uncertain times but increases

during a strong labor market, which has been seen in the post-pandemic era (Goldhaber

& Theobald, 2023).

In addition to the strong labor market, many teachers felt stressed by virtual and

hybrid learning models, the increased needs of students, and parent backlash. Devers et

al. (2024) talked to ten veteran teachers who had left the profession after the pandemic. These former teachers listed stress, financial concerns, less professional autonomy, lack of parental support, and lack of administrative support as reasons for leaving after the pandemic. One researcher noted that during the pandemic, "A much higher proportion of teachers reported frequent job-related stress and symptoms of depression than the general adult population" (Steiner & Woo, 2021, para. 5). These teachers listed both virtual and hybrid instructional models as their highest-ranked stressors (Steiner & Woo, 2021). Still, Goldhaber and Theobald (2023) went on to add that students in traditionally underperforming schools were hit the hardest, as school-to-school-teacher migration increased. This caused experienced teachers to move away from more challenging, lower paying schools. In addition, Fuller (2022) noted that in Pennsylvania, like many other states, school districts hired over 3,000 more professionals to account for academic and mental health needs. This added to teacher migration and the ongoing teacher shortage in the wake of the pandemic.

Finally, many teachers, particularly in hard-to-staff areas like math and science, found better paying jobs in the private sector. Goldhaber and Theobald (2023) specifically noted that in 2022, near the end of the pandemic, 55% of teachers said they intended to leave teaching sooner than they had originally planned. Overall, the Covid 19 Pandemic raised stress levels and uncertainty among educators, which eventually pushed teachers out of the profession. Although attrition rates did not skyrocket immediately, they eventually rose sharply due to a strong labor market and more school-to-school migration in the school years directly following the pandemic.

School Safety Concerns

　　With high rates of school violence seen on the news, one would suspect that growing fears would have an impact on teacher attrition. Several articles shed light on the influence of school violence on teacher turnover; however, most studies highlight the importance of school organization and student behavioral control. Many studies looked at incidents of both student aggression and parent aggression as possible factors in teacher attrition. May et al. (2010) showed that teachers were becoming increasingly fearful of angry parents. In this study, 30% of Kentucky teachers described seeing at least one act of parent aggression in their career. In a separate study, research indicated that 5.8% of teachers reported being physically attacked by students, and 44% of these victims shared that it regularly impacted their job performance (Farmer, 2020). A more recent study surveyed over 450 teachers and found that parents regularly become upset over discipline or grades and can become aggressive toward teachers (McMahon et al., 2023). When teachers face parental aggression, they experience anxiety and a loss of empowerment, and they are more likely to leave the teaching profession (McMahon et al., 2023). School safety was not listed as one of the major factors in teacher attrition, but student behavior and parent aggression were noted as key factors that lead to stress, anxiety, and wanting to leave teaching.

Lack of Autonomy

　　Teachers enjoy creativity and value their autonomy to plan lessons of their own. When this creativity is stifled, many teachers lose the joy of teaching. Furthermore, teachers appreciate having some say in the polices of their school. When teachers feel they have a say in their school's policies, they feel more respected.   Ingersoll et al. (2018) found that the teacher accountability movement has decreased teacher control in

the classroom. Teacher control is essential to having a positive school climate. Lack of control can lead to increased student misbehavior, lower collegiality among staff, and higher turnover rates. When teachers have a say in decision making, they are more likely to perform effectively and earn the respect of colleagues and students. Nguyen et al. (2020) also showed that teachers who experience high levels of autonomy are more likely to remain in their positions because autonomy is closely linked with job satisfaction.

To summarize, teachers leave for a variety of reasons: some of which can be controlled, and others cannot. Less than a third of teachers leave because of retirement, but many more leave for a variety of other reasons before retirement. School districts cannot control all attrition-causing factors, like when teachers leave to raise a child, for a change of location, or for a lifestyle change, etc. On the other hand, school districts have some control over certain attrition-causing factors, such as low salaries, lack of support, and overwhelming workloads. The focus of the next part of this literature review will be on methods that promote teacher retention.

District Retention Strategies

To this point, the research has shed light on which teachers are leaving, why teacher attrition is a problem, and what motivates teachers to leave the profession. The next logical step is to look at what school districts and administrators can do to keep teachers from leaving their schools.

Raising Salaries

Low salary is one of the most frequently cited reasons for teacher attrition. Hughes (2012) found that teachers who were satisfied with their salary were twice as likely to be retained as those who were not. Teachers, who require costly four-year

degrees, need to make enough to support themselves and pay off their student loans.

When compared to other professions requiring a four-year degree, teachers make far less.

Thus, early career teachers need to make a high enough starting salary to cover these

costs. Van den Borre et al. (2021) reviewed data from multiple countries and found that

higher annual starting salaries are associated with greater retention of early career

teachers. In the past, low salaries were justified with strong benefits packages, a pension,

and summers off. However, these benefits are becoming less enticing for teachers, who

are struggling to support themselves. Harris et al. (2019) surveyed parents, teachers, and

principals in one western state on their perceptions of teacher attrition. This data

incorporated information from over 2,000 teachers, 93 administrators, and nearly 500

parents. They found that low salaries were a major cause of attrition, but they also found

that raising salaries alone was not effective at reducing attrition (Harris et al., 2019).

To be clear, there is some evidence that raising salaries can have an impact on

retention, especially through merit pay or bonus packages. Hanushek et al. (2016) found

that compensation systems in Washington D.C. and Texas schools, which increased pay

for highly effective teachers, increased teacher retention rates and student achievement.

Nguyen et al. (2020) also found evidence that retention bonuses and merit pay can be

influential in improving teacher retention and reducing teacher turnover.

While low salaries are often cited as a reason for attrition, raising salaries alone

has not been shown to promote high levels of teacher retention.   Many teachers admit

that they did not go into the profession to get rich. They went into the profession to make

a difference in society. When teachers feel ineffective, disrespected, and unsupported,

this is when they begin to question why they are working for such low salaries.

According to Cross (2011), low salaries are not the top reason for teachers leaving. "Educators want supportive school leadership, enough time for planning and collaboration, an atmosphere of trust and respect, and an appropriate workload" (Cross, 2011, p. 23). Richard Ingersoll, who has published a wealth of information on this topic, stated very clearly that "salary is not the main factor" in promoting teacher retention (The Brainwaves Video Anthology, 2018). Farber (2013) interviewed many teachers about the subject of increasing salaries and teacher attrition, and one teacher explained it clearly:

> I left because of lack of respect for the profession. People say they respect it.
>
> They need to put their money where their mouth is. Now, I work half as hard, get
>
> twice the pay, more respect, and I can feel safe at work. (p. 85)

Therefore, salary increases have been shown to promote teacher retention, but they are not a panacea. Salary increases are only one piece to the puzzle in promoting teacher retention in our schools. Many other strategies are needed in conjunction with fair wages to promote teacher retention.

Positive School Climate and Culture

Building a positive school climate is essential to teacher retention. Teachers are less likely to leave when they are satisfied with the school environment and administrative support (Nguyen et al., 2020). Vaidya and Hanna (2023) looked at human social, structural, and psychological capital impacting attrition. They found that "teachers thrive when there is an opportunity to participate in a school community and when there is support from peers and others in the school" (Vaidya & Hanna, 2023, p. 29). School culture and climate are directly related to teacher job satisfaction and retention. Climate and culture are related to feelings among colleagues, support from administrators, and relationships with parents (Fiore & Whitaker, 2004). Van der Vyver

et al. (2020) added that school climate can promote higher levels of teacher efficacy and can help teachers feel more satisfied in their work. When teachers feel more support, it promotes teacher retention and improves student achievement. "The stability of teachers remaining in the profession due to positive professional wellbeing indirectly results in improved learner performance" (Van der Vyver et al., 2020, p. 99). If districts want to retain good teachers and promote student achievement, creating a positive school climate can tip the scales in their favor.

Hiring

The hiring process plays an important role in promoting teacher retention. When the right teachers are hired for the right jobs, they rarely quit. One important point in hiring teachers is finding those who truly want to be teachers. Teachers who chose teaching as their first career choice and teachers who are intrinsically motivated to teach are much more likely to stay in the profession longer than those who chose teaching because they had no other alternative. "The teaching profession has been characterized by high levels of intrinsic and altruistic motivation which have been associated with a greater commitment to teaching later in the career" (Van den Borre et al., 2021, p. 105). Countries that have competitive entry exams, higher starting salaries, and more overall respect for the profession attract more teachers who truly want to be teachers. Not surprisingly, these countries have higher rates of teacher retention (Van den Borre et al., 2021). Although districts may not have the ability to control some of these variables, they have some control over the quality of teachers they hire. This can and should promote teacher retention. The hiring committee should be up front about the vision of the school, the expectations of the job, and the student population the teacher will

encounter (Heller, 2004). Kullar and Cunningham (2019) discuss at length the importance of hiring new teachers. They recommend including current teachers in the hiring process, marketing a school to new candidates, being specific about school needs, and being very thorough in the interview process (Kullar & Cunningham, 2019). Some methods to create a more thorough hiring process can include setting up multiple interviews, requiring an instructional component, tailoring questions to the specific position, and checking references (Kullar & Cunningham, 2019).

Mentoring and Induction

Much of the current evidence on teacher attrition shows that most teachers are leaving the profession early in their career. Improving mentor and induction programs can be a pivotal strategy in keeping teachers in schools. According to Clement (2016), time with experienced teachers and mentors is time well spent, and 96% of teachers can be retained with quality mentoring. After reviewing over 11,000 surveys, Van den Borre et al. (2021) found early-career teachers who received constructive feedback from a mentor and who had more access to professional development were much more likely to remain teachers than those who did not have these supports. For mentor programs to work correctly, mentors must be chosen wisely, and mentors must have time with their mentee, preferably a common prep period (Heller, 2004). As for orientation programs, these should last three days, and on-going professional development must be provided over the first five years to sufficiently support new teachers (Clement, 2016).

Improving Efficiency

Another popularly cited factor in teacher turnover is the burnout caused by large amounts of paperwork and inefficient operating procedures. Tompkins (2023) found that

64% of California teachers in his study said that less busy work and paperwork would increase job satisfaction. "Teachers can become so bogged down in paperwork and seemingly meaningless bureaucratic activities that they lose interest in the work of being a teacher" (Becker & Grob, 2021, p. 14). School leaders, then, must act as protectors against too much paperwork and streamline these processes (Becker & Grob, 2021). To promote retention, teachers need more efficient school systems where they have prep time, disciplinary support, resource availability, a trusting school environment, and reasonable expectations (Harris et al. 2019). Parents and principals often think teachers leave because of low pay, disrespectful students, and lifestyle changes, but that is not always the case according to teachers. Harris et al. (2019) noted that 80% of teachers in his study said overwhelming work expectations were a reason for leaving and found that 25% of teachers did not like their job due to high amounts of paperwork. What teachers do want is a supportive school environment where parents and students are engaged. This has been shown to significantly impact teacher job satisfaction and their likelihood to stay (Hughes, 2012). And while some may think that having a lot of resources and top of the line facilities might promote retention, these have not been shown to have a major impact on teacher retention (Hughes, 2012).

Increasing Teacher Autonomy

Teachers want to work in school systems where they have the freedom to teach in their own way. State mandates have led to districts being more involved in what teachers are teaching in their classrooms. This has led to teachers feeling smothered by district regulations and in many ways has removed the joy, creativity, and fun from the profession. Nguyen et al. (2020) found that teachers with more classroom autonomy are

more likely to stay in the profession than those with less freedom to teach as they choose. According to DeMatthews et al. (2022), higher levels of teacher autonomy are associated with increased job satisfaction and retention. This means giving teachers more freedom to make decisions about their teaching methods and classroom environment.

School districts have many viable options to promote teacher retention. Raising salaries can be one option that aids teacher retention, but there are strategies. Retention bonuses and merit pay have been shown to have some influence on retention. Furthermore, supportive environments with strong induction programs, efficient processes, and teacher autonomy have all been shown to increase teacher retention. Above and beyond these district strategies, the school principal plays an essential role in teacher retention.

The Importance of Principal Support

Outside of salary increases, satisfaction with the school principal is one of the most frequently cited factors in teacher retention. Boyd et al. (2011) surveyed over 4,000 first-year teachers in New York City and followed up with 400 more in their second year. According to this research, 40% of those who left teaching after year one mentioned dissatisfaction with the principal as a key reason for leaving (Boyd et al., 2011). Teacher efficacy is increased when principals provide instructional feedback, support for their decisions in front of others, and recognition of a job well done (Hughes et al., 2014). The relationship with the principal is so pivotal that when a principal leaves, teachers often follow. DeMatthews et al. (2022) saw an increase of 2.3% in teacher turnover in the year after a principal left a school. Although principal transfers showed an overall negative impact on teacher retention, hiring experienced principals was shown to promote

retention in the following school year (DeMatthews et al., 2022). Nguyen et al. (2020)

explained that a one standard deviation increase in administrative support is associated

with a 1.3 percentage point decrease in turnover and a 9% decrease in the teacher

mobility rate.   Hence, principal support has been shown to increase teacher retention

significantly.

Communication and Vision

In a meta-analysis of 14 studies, Shell et al. (2023) specifically stated, "Principal

characteristics, particularly the support for teachers and open, clear communication, have

a considerable impact on teacher retention" (p. 112). Clear communication, support, and

encouragement were the most listed factors that teachers noted as promoting retention

and job satisfaction (Shell et al., 2023). The best principals are effective communicators

and create a vision that is inclusive of the entire staff. According to Fiore and Whitaker

(2004), the best principals are visible, exude positive energy, communicate well, build a

positive school culture, and empower others through service. Communication, trust, and

building personal connections are all typically listed as important supports by teachers

(Tran et al., 2023). Building on communication, good principals create a unifying vision

for their school. "Shared vision is about members of a team or organization having

widespread agreement on where the organization is headed" (Becker & Grob, 2021, p. 9).

Thus, principals who communicate well, build trust, and create a shared vision have more

success in retaining staff.

Discipline Support

After clear communication and encouragement, follow-through on student

disciplinary measures is consistently listed as an important support provided by the

principal (Shell et al., 2023). According to Tran et al. (2023), the top three administrative

supports consistently listed by teachers are respect, enforcing discipline, and having an

open-door policy with a supportive leader. "It is pertinent to understand that school

principals who support teachers during student disciplinary actions enhance teachers'

trust and respect for them" (Shell et al., 2023, p. 112). Teachers are more likely to stay

when they have higher perceptions of student behavior regulation, safety, and order

(Becker & Grob, 2021). Teachers are also more likely to stay in harder to staff schools

when they feel supported by the principal. "Teachers will likely stay in schools serving

higher proportions of traditionally disadvantaged students if they feel supported and are

satisfied with their working conditions" (Nguyen et al., 2020, p. 12). Therefore, it is very

important for principals to set clear behavior expectations, back teachers during

disciplinary issues, and involve teachers in developing safety and discipline policies

(Becker & Grob, 2021). When teachers feel that students' behaviors are under control,

they feel safer and are more likely to be satisfied in their work.

Mentoring for Principals

Even though principals realize their impact on teacher retention, most principals

think they provide more support than they really do. This is why principals need

increased training on how to support teachers. To do this, some researchers suggest

providing more support for principals in this regard. Apprentice and mentoring programs

are very important as well as ongoing training and professional development for

principals. To be fair, Pennsylvania requires principals to continue their professional

development through the Pennsylvania Inspired Leadership (PIL) Program. This is a

"statewide, standards-based continuing professional education program for school and

system leaders. This comprehensive program is focused on developing the capacity of leaders to improve student achievement" (Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, 2024, para. 1). For principals to succeed, specific training is needed in conflict resolution, instructional leadership, and communication (Boyd et al., 2011).   And because high-need schools see the highest rates of teacher attrition, researchers recommend incentives for principals at high-need schools to support these teachers (Boyd et al., 2011).

Overall, principals play an important role in teacher retention. Satisfaction with the school principal is second only to improving salaries as a factor listed to help improve teacher retention. According to the research, the best principals discipline students consistently, encourage teachers, communicate well, and create a positive school environment. Just as mentoring can be helpful for teachers, it can be beneficial for new principals as well.

Leadership Styles That Promote Retention

Since the principal plays such a key role in teacher retention, some research has delved into what leadership styles are the most effective. Distributive leadership, servant leadership, authentic leadership, transactional leadership, and transformational leadership have all been cited as effective leadership styles for today's principal.

Distributive Leadership

Teachers enjoy being a part of the decision-making process, and they want to be involved in leadership roles in the school. Therefore, distributive (or distributed) leadership has been cited as an effective leadership style to empower teachers. Distributive leadership promotes shared responsibility among staff which can improve faculty morale. Schools can develop a sense of ownership and belonging using this style,

which leads to higher retention rates (Sulit, 2020).   Many principals confuse distributive

leadership with delegating, but it is much more than that. It includes coaching and

empowering teacher leaders within a school (Solly, 2018). "The purpose of distributed

leadership is to increase the leadership capacity within a school so that the school can

improve and grow in an authentic manner, with no tricks, stunts, or game-playing" (Solly,

2018, para. 8). In a small qualitative study in Arizona, half of the participants said that

distributive leadership would play a meaningful role in them choosing to remain teachers

(Sulit, 2020). "This approach empowers teachers, staff, and even students to take on

leadership roles, contributing to decision-making and school improvement" (Morgan,

2023, para. 34).   In distributive leadership, the principal is no longer someone who fixes

all the problems for everyone. The principal's job is to build leadership among teachers

through creating a shared vision of success. The principal does not need to have all the

answers (Heller, 2004). In sum, teachers support distributive leadership as a strategy

because it builds teacher leaders in a school and has been shown to promote job

satisfaction and teacher retention.

Authentic Leadership

Authentic leadership was first defined by Bill George in 2003 in his book

Authentic Leadership (Western Governors University, 2020). George described authentic

leaders as leaders who have a sense of purpose, distinct values, and self-discipline.

Authentic leaders build relationships with people, show compassion, and listen to their

employees (Western Governors University, 2020). Evers-Gerdes and Siegle (2021)

explained that principals who are authentic leaders are much more likely to retain

teachers because they build trusting relationships with faculty. "When teachers don't trust

you as their leader, they are less likely to support any of your efforts, even when those

efforts are valid and worthy of consideration" (Ever-Gerdes & Siegle, 2021, p. 88). A

common theme from much of the research on principal support is that teachers do not

feel like their principals really listen to them. Evers-Gerde and Siegle (2021) interviewed

one teacher who stated, "It would be helpful if he [the principal] would just take the time

to listen to me and place value in what I have to say" (p. 106). Authentic leaders build

efficacy in their teachers, making them feel like they are effective as individuals and as a

group, through constant encouragement. Teachers who feel more effective are much less

likely to burn out and leave the profession. Authentic leaders consistently work to foster

relational trust between them and their employees. "For trust to grow, there needs to be

continuous validation of role expectations; the work of maintaining relational trust cannot

be sporadic" (Becker & Grob, 2021, p. 11). Building trust takes on-going work; it cannot

be a one-time conversation. To be an authentic leader, principals cannot be a traditional

boss that gives orders and has all the answers (Heller, 2004). The principal's role has

changed to one who listens to his or her employees, builds relationships, and encourages

teachers.

Servant Leadership

Servant leadership was first defined as a leadership style by Robert K. Greenleaf

in a 1970 essay entitled "The Servant as Leader." According to Greenleaf, servant

leadership is markedly different from the traditional top-down approach to leadership,

wherein the leader has the power and expects others to blindly follow. Servant leaders,

by contrast, share power with others, put the needs of others first, and focus on

developing others to reach their highest potential (Greenleaf Center for Servant

Leadership, 2021). "For servant leaders…, leading is about the selfless pursuit of developing people, enriching their lives and supporting them to become the best version of themselves" (Evers-Gerdes & Siegle, 2021, p. 41). Studies have shown that servant leadership can be effective in promoting teacher retention. Shaw and Newton (2014) surveyed 234 high school teachers and found a strong correlation between servant leadership and the likelihood of teachers being retained. They went on to note that teacher job satisfaction levels were higher depending on the levels of servant leadership implemented by the principal (Shaw & Newton, 2014). Kainde and Mandagi (2023) put together an extensive literature review that included 50 studies on the impact of servant leadership on educational outcomes. The overwhelming evidence from their study found that servant leaders enhance teacher morale, increase job satisfaction, increase employee engagement, and build a positive, trusting school culture. "Servant leadership emerges as a powerful catalyst, positively shaping the dynamics of teacher-administrator relationships and fostering a positive and engaged teaching workforce" (Kainde & Mandagi, 2023, p. 2571).

Transactional, Transformational, and Laissez-faire Leadership

Transactional and transformational leadership are two styles that were developed through the research of James McGregor Burns and built on by Bernard M. Bass. Transactional leadership focuses on exchanges between leaders and followers that are characterized by a clear structure of rewards and punishments based on performance (Bass, 1995). "Transactional leaders…recognized what it was you wanted to get from your work and tried to see that you got what you wanted" (Bass, 1995, p. 469). In the educational setting, this occurs when principals provide some type of positive recognition for a job well done. This may come in the form of praise or some type of extrinsic

reward, which has been shown to have a positive impact on teacher retention. Van der

Vyver et al. (2020) noted that principals who utilize transactional leadership had a

positive impact on teachers' efficacy when they rewarded them for doing good work.

However, transactional leadership focuses primarily on performance outcomes and task

completion but does little to inspire or develop followers (Bass, 1995).

      Transformational leadership has a broad range of categories and is much more

difficult to define. Transformative leaders may utilize some transactional devices, but

they align the goals of their followers with the needs of the organization. Transformative

leaders create a clear vision, inspire creativity, pay attention to individual needs, and

empower their employees (Bass, 1995). "Transforming leaders convert followers to

disciples; they develop followers into leaders" (Bass, 1995, p. 467). Transformational

leadership has been shown to increase job satisfaction and team performance. Braun et

al. (2012) surveyed 360 employees from 39 academic teams in the fields of medicine and

natural sciences. They found a positive relationship between individual supervisors'

transformational leadership and followers' job satisfaction. They also found that trust

was the key factor that employees listed as promoting such job satisfaction (Braun et al.,

2012). There is some recent evidence that transformational leadership can be an effective

style in promoting teacher retention. Van der Vyver et al. (2020) found that

transformational leadership reduced stress and increased well-being in teachers, whereas

laissez-faire leadership was associated with lower levels of teacher well-being.

      Laissez-faire leadership is basically a hands-off leadership style, and it was found

that although teachers need some level of autonomy, a complete hands-off style of

leadership is ineffective in schools. Thus, the overwhelming evidence presented by Van

der Vyver et al. (2020) was that both transactional and transformational approaches are related to positive teacher well-being which promotes teacher retention.

Several leadership styles surfaced as being effective in promoting teacher retention. Distributive leadership occurs when a principal shares power within a school. Authentic leadership occurs when principals are genuine and form trusting relationships with their staff. Like distributive and authentic leadership, servant leaders build relationships, listen to employees, and empower teachers. Finally, transactional leaders provide rewards for positive behaviors, while transformational leaders inspire high performance from their staff. Each of these leadership styles have similar elements and have been shown to increase teacher job satisfaction and promote retention.

Summary

Historically, teacher attrition has been an issue in the United States and throughout the world. Just recently, it has become a larger issue due to a decrease in new teacher candidates and many other variables. The Covid 19 Pandemic has proven to be a major reason for teacher attrition and migration. Low salaries in relation to inflation rates, other professions, and student loan debts have also had an impact on teacher turnover. Finally, school operations and support have proven to be a major influence on teacher turnover. Student discipline, lack of support for new teachers, and increased stress over testing are some examples of school operations that have added to teachers wanting to leave the profession.

Research has noted several strategies that are effective in promoting teacher retention. Raising salaries, particularly in the form of bonuses and merit pay, can be effective in keeping quality teachers. However, salary is not the only strategy for keeping

teachers in schools. Creating a positive school climate, allowing room for teacher autonomy, hiring strong candidates, and creating supportive schools can all be impactful in retaining quality teachers.

Principals play an important role in creating a positive environment for teachers. Studies have shown that the principal can be one of the deciding factors in whether or not a teacher wishes to stay at a school or leave. Principals can employ a variety of leadership styles, including distributive, servant, transactional, transformational, and authentic leadership.

Still, there are many gaps in the research pertaining to teacher retention.   Little research was found on the impact of school shootings on teacher attrition. Additionally, it is very difficult to pinpoint the exact impact of teacher attrition on individual student performance. Many studies have been tried with mixed results. Some studies have shown negative correlations between teachers leaving and student achievement, while others have shown positive results when poor teachers leave. Finally, though the world economy has largely rebounded from Covid 19, not enough time has lapsed to see the overall impact of the pandemic on our educational systems. The United States educational system is likely still seeing the results on students and teachers of the complete upheaval it experienced from 2020 to 2022.

Given these circumstances, the researcher has continued to see marked increases in teacher turnover in his own school district and surrounding school districts in central Pennsylvania in the counties surrounding Altoona and State College. This necessitated the need for more research to look further into why teachers are choosing to leave public schools in central Pennsylvania and what schools can do about this issue.

CHAPTER III

Methodology

As the literature shows, teachers are leaving the profession and transferring schools at unprecedented levels in the years following the Covid 19 Pandemic both in Pennsylvania and nationally. On a broad scale, research shows that teachers leave the profession for a variety of reasons, and the most commonly listed factors include low salary, lack of administrative support, decreased autonomy, and increased stress. Conversely, research shows that increased compensation promotes teacher retention, but it is not the only strategy for promoting retention. Increased support from the administration, better mentoring programs, and more orderly school environments are all commonly mentioned as factors for retaining teachers. Teachers who feel valued, safe, and respected are more likely to be retained even without considering salary and benefits. In a nutshell, a wide range of research has shown why teachers leave or stay in a given school and the profession altogether. However, the researcher sought to understand the recent increase in teacher attrition on a more local level.

Historically, high percentages of teachers in central Pennsylvania remained in a given school district throughout their entire career. This trend has shifted dramatically in recent years. In the past two years alone, the researcher has replaced 12 teachers among his staff of 32 teachers at the middle school level, more than one-third of the entire staff. Since the summer of 2020, 68% of the faculty at the researcher's middle school have been replaced. During that same time period, the elementary school saw 40% of its teachers leave, while the high school saw 31% leave. This amounts to 66 total teachers who have left the district since the Covid 19 Pandemic. This turnover rate has caused

increased stress at the school and district levels. A great deal of institutional knowledge was lost when these teachers left. Plus, new teachers needed to be hired, trained, and mentored, which created increased workloads for administration and remaining faculty members. In addition, faculty morale has become strained because many teachers have seen their network of colleagues leave the district. Altogether, the dramatic increase in teacher turnover coupled with the fallout from such turnover inspired the researcher to seek a deeper understanding of the phenomenon on a regional and local level.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of why teachers are leaving their teaching positions in the researcher's own district as well as surrounding districts. The study used a mixed-methods design, which incorporated both numerical survey data and qualitative, narrative data. The study was a non-experimental, phenomenological study with the researcher seeking a better understanding of the phenomenon of teacher attrition and perspectives on retention. According to Mertler (2022, p. 95), "The intent of phenomenological studies is to describe and interpret the experiences or reactions of participants to a particular phenomenon from their individual perspectives." The information gleaned from this study will allow the researcher to make recommendations that can be presented to the district-level administration in his own school district, and it will also inform his own professional practice as a middle school principal.

Although the literature on this topic is extensive nationally, the researcher sought to understand the phenomenon at the local level. The researcher wanted to understand why teachers are leaving his own district in particular, what can be done about it at the

district level, and what principals can do about it. The researcher included participants in

his survey from surrounding school districts to see if teachers' perspectives on this topic

were similar or different to that of teachers in his own district. The research questions

that guided this study are listed below.

Research Questions

1. What are the main reasons teachers want to leave public schools in central

    Pennsylvania, and how does this compare or contrast with the researcher's own

    school district?

2. What working conditions promote teacher retention?

3. What forms of support do teachers need from principals to promote retention?

    These research questions served as the driving force of this entire study. The

answers to these questions provided essential knowledge that the researcher can use to

help his own school district retain high-quality teachers.

Setting

This study was set in central Pennsylvania, incorporating school districts in Blair,

Clearfield, and Huntingdon Counties. Blair County provided the majority of the

participants for the study. Blair County covers 525.8 square miles with 122,822 people

residing within its boundaries (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020). According to 2020 census

data, the median household income in Blair County is $54,002, and the employment rate

sits at 56.3% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020). The researcher's school district lies mostly in

northern Blair County as well as parts of Huntingdon and Centre counties in central

Pennsylvania. The district covers 176 square miles total, and roughly 12,600 people

reside within its boundaries (TASD, 2025). The entirety of the district is largely rural

with many residents seeking employment in the larger communities of State College and Altoona. The district serves approximately 1800 students across three schools, including an elementary (which includes preschool), a middle school, and a high school (TASD, 2025).   Among the student population, 56.1% are considered economically disadvantaged, 15.7% receive special education services, and 95.7% identify as Caucasian (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2025).

Participants

As described later in the research plan, the researcher collected data using three instruments, including a survey, a focus group, and individual interviews. During the first phase of the study, the researcher emailed surveys to all superintendents in his own county as well as superintendents in other surrounding districts in other counties. In all, 11 school districts were invited to participate in the survey portion of the study. Four of seven school districts in the same county, and two school districts from surrounding counties participated in the survey portion of the study. These counties are largely rural and have similar demographic features, such as ethnic/racial backgrounds and socioeconomic levels. In all, 132 teachers from six school districts responded to the survey. Thirty-one respondents came from the researcher's own district, and 101 respondents came from nearby school districts. The participating districts provided variation in size. Three districts can be described as smaller than the researcher's, one participating district can be described as significantly larger than the researcher's, and another district can be described as relatively the same size as the researcher's.

A wide range of participants responded to the survey. The gender make-up of the participants was 70.5% female and 29.5% male. Figure 1 shows that a slight majority of the respondents could be described as veteran teachers with over 16 years of experience.

Figure 1

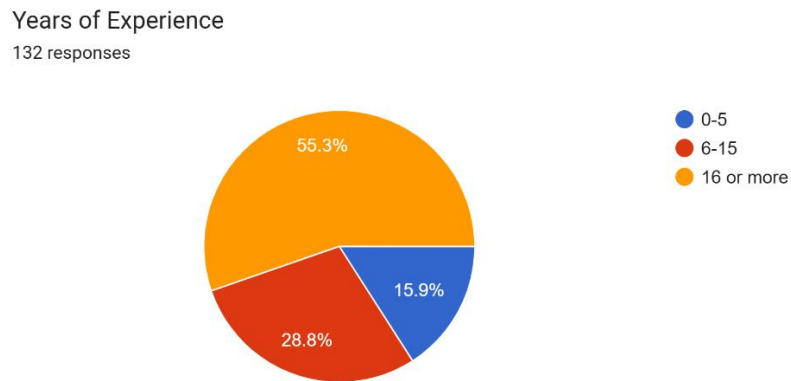*Participants' Experience Levels*

Figure 2 shows that teachers from a variety of grade bands responded to the survey.

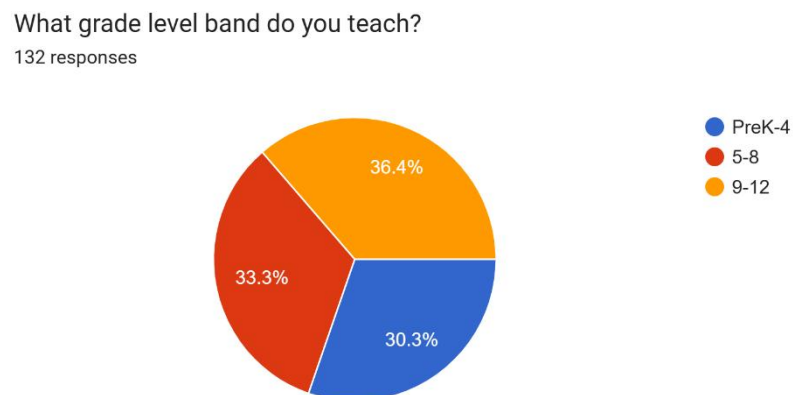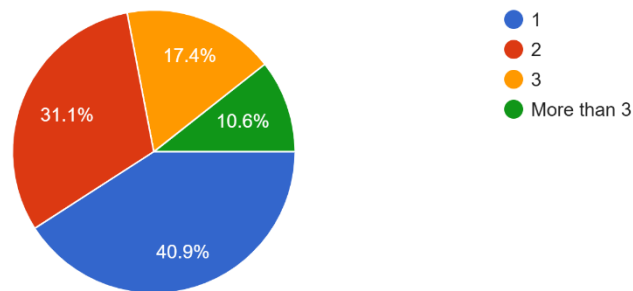**Figure 2**

Participants' Grade Bands

Figure 3 shows the degree to which some of the respondents have moved around in their teaching career.

Figure 3

Number of Districts in Which Participants Worked

In how many different school districts have you worked?
132 responses

The researcher used a focus group to collect information using only teachers from his own school district. The focus group consisted of ten teachers in total. Six of the ten participants in the focus group were female. Four participants were elementary teachers, four were middle school teachers, and two were high school teachers. Teachers from a variety of career points participated in focus group.

Twelve former teachers from the researcher's school district were invited to participate in the interview process. All those invited had left the school since the Covid 19 Pandemic or the 2020-2021 school year. Of the twelve former teachers who were invited to participate in the study, seven agreed to participate. Three participants were elementary teachers, three were middle school teachers, and one taught at the high school level. Four of the participants were female, while three were male. Since leaving the district, three participants taught in a larger school district, three taught at smaller,

religious-affiliated schools, and one no longer worked in K-12 education. Therefore, a variety of former teachers from many backgrounds or who left for various reasons were sought out to participate in the interview process.

Research Plan

Broad national and international research shows that teacher attrition has become a major issue facing schools, particularly since the Covid 19 Pandemic in 2020. National research has shown that increased stress levels coupled with financial reasons have led to large scale teacher attrition. Most of these studies, however, have focused on a national level. This study homed in on Blair County and surrounding counties in central Pennsylvania to see if these same reasons for attrition held true at a more local level. According to the National Education Association (2024), the average starting teaching salary in Pennsylvania is $49,083, but the minimum living wage is higher at $57,664. By comparison, the average starting teaching salary in Blair County is far lower at $45,347 (Pennsylvania State Teachers Association, 2025).   Not only are teachers entering the workforce with salaries lower than average, but they are also facing mounting levels of student loan debt. Pennsylvania teachers earn 18% less than similarly educated professionals, which means they have less money available after paying student loans than other professionals (National Education Association, 2024). Given that information, are financial concerns really the main driving force behind teachers leaving public schools in central Pennsylvania? Or, are other reasons—such as perceived unfair work expectations, discipline issues, and stress—causing teachers to leave? What's more, the researcher's own school has seen a sharp increase in teachers leaving his school district. Are teachers in surrounding districts voicing the same concerns about teacher attrition?

These factors set the stage for the research plan, which included multiple data collection tools. This research plan can be described as phenomenological and/or descriptive. As Mertler (2022) explains, descriptive research allows the researcher to describe and interpret the current status of individuals, settings, conditions, and events. The researcher studies a phenomenon as it exists naturally with no attempt to manipulate the individuals, conditions, or events (Mertler, 2022). In sum, the plan consisted of three distinct data collection methods, with each providing a unique perspective on the same phenomenon.

Multiple perspectives gained from multiple data collection tools and participants provided detailed information about why teachers are leaving and what school districts can do about. Teachers from surrounding districts were surveyed, teachers from within the district were interviewed as a group, and finally former teachers were interviewed. Also known as triangulation, "The use of multiple methods and sources of data collection only serve to enhance the validity of both research data and findings" (Mertler, 2022, p. 204). This multi-faceted approach to data collection provided the researcher with the answers to his research questions and informed his plan of action for promoting teacher retention in his school district.

Research Methods

In order to gain multiple perspectives on this problem, the researcher used a mixed methods approach to research. Mixed-methods research uses aspects of both qualitative and quantitative research. Both quantitative and qualitative research methods provide benefits and limits to the researcher. Therefore, using both methods allows the researcher to pull from the strengths of both methods. Quantitative data typically targets

a larger sample, and therefore, the data can be more easily applied to the wider population (Dawadi et al., 2021). Quantitative data can easily be placed into a graph to provide a visual representation of the data. Qualitative data, on the other hand, "provides a deeper understanding of the issue being investigated, honoring the voices of the participants" (Dawadi et al., 2021). While it is more difficult to provide a visual representation of qualitative data, this data provides first-hand information from people living through the phenomenon in question.

Several variations of mixed-methods research have been developed over the years. For this study, the researcher chose a convergent parallel design. Using this design, the researcher collects both quantitative and qualitative data in the same time frame. Both forms of data are given equal importance and analyzed independently (Mertler, 2022). Other mixed-methods approaches may start with a broad quantitative portion of the study. Then, based on what is found in that portion of the study, the researcher will use a qualitative approach to focus the second portion of the study on certain participants or certain topics. For the purposes of this study, the researcher gave equal weight to both forms of data, both were collected in the same time frame, and both were analyzed during the same time frame. An in-depth explanation of this research process is provided in the next section.

Data Collection

The data collection process for this study took place during February and March 2025. The planning process, however, began in the Summer of 2024 when surveys, focus group questions, and interview questions were developed. These were compiled and sent digitally in an application to the PennWest University Institutional Review Board in July

2024. The researcher received approval with no revisions needed, effective July 29,

2024, with an expiration date of July 28, 2025. A copy of the PennWest IRB Approval

can be found in Appendix A. Initial research began with a review of related literature in

the Fall of 2024, and the data collection process was implemented in the Winter of 2025.

Surveys

The first data collection tool used was a survey sent out to all Blair County school

districts as well as other school districts in surrounding counties. The information gained

from this survey was both quantitative and qualitative. This information allowed the

researcher to compare and contrast viewpoints from other districts' teachers with his own

district's teachers. The researcher began the process in early February 2025 by emailing

surveys to superintendents in surrounding school districts. Surveys were emailed to 11

superintendents on February 3, 2025, and teachers in these districts were given until

February 14, 2025, to respond to the survey. Six out of 11 school superintendents

forwarded the study out to their faculty. Some superintendents responded with

reservations about certain aspects of the study, while others did not respond at all.

Google Forms was used to create the survey, and an informed consent to participate was

provided at the beginning of the survey (Appendix B). Respondents could not move on

to the second portion of the survey without agreeing to the informed consent. The survey

provided quantitative data based on questions which were anchored to each of the three

larger research questions. Several open-ended questions were also included in the survey,

providing some qualitative information from this data collection tool. This information

provided a window into the thoughts and feelings of the participants in the survey. In all,

132 participants responded from six different school districts. The researcher deemed

this response rate a success because a variety of schools were represented and a variety of teachers at different career points were represented in the responses. A copy of the survey can be found in Appendix C.

Focus Group

The second data collection tool came in the form of a focus group. This second phase began in mid-February 2025, directly following the deadline for the survey. Focus groups typically consist of about 10-12 individuals. According to Mertler (2022), focus groups provide a more comfortable setting because people are often more comfortable talking in small groups, and they are more likely to feed off of one another's responses. The focus group consisted of only current employees of the researcher's own district, which provided a unique perspective of those working in that district alone. Since the participants in this part of the study were teachers within the researcher's own district, great lengths were taken to make the participants feel comfortable. Therefore, the researcher enlisted an honest broker to moderate the focus group. The honest broker was chosen for two reasons. First, she was a recent doctoral student herself, so she possessed familiarity with research protocols. Second, she was employed by the local intermediate unit, so while she was familiar with the district, she maintained a third-party relationship with the district.

Once this person agreed to moderate the group, the researcher emailed all district faculty asking for participation in the focus group. An initial email was sent out on February 14, 2025, asking for participation in the group. An informed consent form to participate in the focus group was created using Google Forms, and a link was included in this email (Appendix B). The researcher explained that all participants would be

entered into a drawing to win a $25 gift card. No responses were received to this initial email, so the researcher sent a follow-up email on February 20, 2025. In this email, the researcher specified the time frame to sixty minutes total and provided a clear date and time for the event. After this email, twelve teachers agreed to participate, but two others had prior obligations and could not participate in the focus group itself, leaving a total of 10 participants.

The focus group took place on February 25, 2025, from 3:05-4:05PM. The honest broker facilitated the event via Zoom, and she recorded the proceedings. Ten questions were provided for the moderator, using a semi-structured interview, which allowed the interviewer to go off the script of questions. These questions were anchored to the three research questions, using the denotations R1, R2, or R3, by each question. A copy of the questions used for the focus group can be found in Appendix D. The honest broker sent the audio file to the researcher via email directly after the focus group had concluded. Focus group participants were made aware that the broker shared this audio file with the researcher. The audio file enabled the researcher to listen to the file, take notes, and upload it to a transcription service for further analysis.

Interviews

The final data collection tool to be implemented was the use of semi-structured interviews with former employees of the researcher's school district. These interviews were conducted by the researcher himself via phone or Zoom. Beginning in early March 2025, this final phase allowed the researcher to gain yet another perspective on teacher attrition and retention. This data provided the perspective of those who had left the district.

The researcher was purposeful in selecting interview participants. "Purposeful sampling involves the intentional selection of individuals and sites to learn about or understand the topic at hand" (Cresswell, 2005, as cited in Mertler, 2022, p. 192). Specifically, the researcher reached out to several teachers who had left his own school district since the 2020-2021 school year. Here, the researcher was intentional about selecting individuals who had left the school district for a variety of reasons and from a variety of schools within the district. This can be described as maximum variation sampling because the researcher sought out participants who differed on some important characteristic or trait (Mertler, 2022). This sampling methodology allowed the researcher to gain a better perspective on the topic from a wide variety of viewpoints (Bobbitt, 2020). Some left education altogether, some left for a non-public school, and others left for another public school.

Contact information for these participants was obtained by the researcher's own personal knowledge base and through discussion with various individuals still working within his school district. Prior to sharing contact information, the researcher asked those sharing the information to ensure the would-be participant was comfortable sharing his or her contact information. In all, the researcher targeted twelve former teachers to participate in the interview process. Using email and text messaging, the researcher began contacting former staff members beginning March 4, 2025. Four individuals worked at the high school level, five worked at the middle school level, and three worked at the elementary level. From that larger sample, only one former high school teacher agreed to participate, three former middle school teachers participated, and all three elementary teachers agreed to participate. An informed consent form was sent to each

participant using Google Forms prior to the interview (Appendix B). The researcher

offered to conduct the interviews via Zoom or through phone. Each method allowed the

researcher to record the interview. The interviews took place from March 6, 2025, to

March 14, 2025.

The ten interview questions used for the study are all anchored to one of the three

main research questions by an R1, R2, or R3 label (Appendix E). All participants were

asked the same ten interview questions during the course of the interview, but the

interviewer had the ability to follow topics of concern or interest. This semi-structured

interview process is beneficial because it allows the researcher to have a basic plan for

the interview, while leeway is also provided to veer from the standard questions to follow

a topic of particular interest (Mertler, 2022). For this reason, interviews ranged in length

from twenty minutes to an hour, depending on the depth of the participant's responses or

any follow-up questions that were asked. During each session, the interviewer used a

pre-printed version of the questions to take notes as the participants responded. Each

session was also recorded to allow for later listening, transcription, and analysis.

Data Collection Timeline

The entire timeline of the data collection process ran from February to March

2025. Prior to implementing the data collection process, a timeline for completing this

research was developed. The researcher focused on one phase of the research at a time

for simplicity purposes; however, no data collection tool necessarily needed to be

implemented prior to another. Because each data collection tool was given equal weight

by the researcher, it made no difference what tools were implemented in what order.

Table 1 provides a simple, visual representation of the research plan as implemented in Winter 2025.

Table 1

Data Collection Plan Implemented in Winter 2025

Data Source	Type of Data	Participants	Data Collection Timeline	Format
Survey	Mostly quantitative & some qualitative	132 current teachers from 6 school districts	February 3-14, 2025	Google Form sent via email.
Focus Group	Qualitative	10 current teachers from the researcher's own district	February 25, 2025	Semi-structured interview facilitated by an honest broker.
Interviews	Qualitative	7 former teachers who left the researcher's own district since 2021.	March 6-March 14, 2025	Semi-structured interview facilitated by the researcher.

Fiscal Information

The cost to complete this study was relatively low. Surveys and forms were developed using Google Forms, which is a free service offered through Google. Other questions and documents were generated using the Microsoft Office Suite. The researcher's district email and Zoom account were utilized to communicate with participants. While these services came at a cost to the district, they would have been provided to the researcher regardless of whether he conducted this study or not. Other added costs to the district included tuition reimbursement for the doctoral candidate, the use of district facilities, and the use of district office supplies. Overall, these costs were

estimated to be less than $12,000 per calendar year. Again, these costs were associated with the employment of middle-level management employees regardless of whether a study was conducted or not.

In addition to the cost to the district, the researcher experienced his own costs throughout this study. The researcher spent much of his own personal time and money on this project. This included purchasing several services to aid in research and data collection. In addition, the researcher used his own personal phone to conduct a great deal of communication for this project. The web-based Dovetail AI tool cost the researcher roughly $80 for a two-month subscription. This was used to help organize and analyze large amounts of data. Plus, the researcher purchased a $25 gift card that was given to one random focus group participant.

Validity

Validity refers to the overall trustworthiness of the research. Valid research is credible, transferable, dependable, and confirmable (Hendricks, 2016). Multiple perspectives were sought during the course of this study in order to ensure that the data was, in fact, valid. The researcher used several data collection tools and sampled a wide variety of participants. According to Hendricks (2016), "When a researcher uses multiple sources to corroborate findings, the credibility of those findings is increased." This triangulation of data sources is necessary in action research, and it was implemented throughout the course of this study (Hendrick, 2016). First, the researcher surveyed participants from several different school districts, including his own. Then, the researcher used a focus group to interview teachers from his own district about the same topic. Finally, the researcher interviewed teachers who had left the school district by

asking their perspectives on the same topic. These three data collection tools allowed the researcher to corroborate data from one source to another.

With all of these perspectives taken as a whole, conclusions drawn from the totality of this research encompassed a range of viewpoints. Therefore, similarities in the responses of participants provided a strong indication that the evidence was valid.   It is highly likely that if teachers from other districts were saying it, current teachers were saying it, and former teachers were saying it, then the evidence must have been valid. Throughout the study, it was the researcher's goal to sort out exactly why teachers are leaving and what could make them stay from their perspective. Talking to one individual from one school would not have provided enough evidence to draw any major conclusions, nor would one set of interviews, or one survey provide all of the needed evidence. Rather, a plethora of evidence from multiple sources and tools provided the researcher with enough data to ensure the information was indeed a strong representation of teachers' feelings on this topic.

Summary

The implementation of this research plan was the culmination of several steps that were put into place long before February 2025. The initial plan was developed in the Summer of 2024. It was at that time that the researcher identified teacher attrition as a research problem worthy of action research within his own school district. At that time, the researcher began to formulate his initial research questions and research plan. The researcher's initial plan focused primarily on his own school district, but after discussions with his superintendent and external chair, the researcher expanded his research sample to include other school districts in his local area. These discussions focused on the need to

understand if teachers were leaving other area school districts for the same reasons they

were leaving his own school district. The researcher took this advice and worked with

his PennWest faculty chair to revise the initial research questions and research plan.

Once the initial plan and questions were created, a survey was created using

Google Forms, and questions for the focus groups and interviews were developed. This

was put into a basic research plan that was reviewed by the PennWest faculty chair, a

PennWest classmate, and the researcher's local external chair. After several revisions, the

researcher obtained permission to implement this plan at the local level by his

superintendent. It was at this point that the researcher compiled his data collection tools

into an IRB application, which was sent digitally to the PennWest Institutional Review

board in mid-July 2024. On July 29, 2025, the IRB application was approved without

revisions (Appendix A).

During the Fall of 2024, the researcher read an extensive amount of literature in

the form of books, websites, and journal articles regarding the topics of teacher attrition

and retention. The researcher organized this review of literature into two main

subsections, one dealing with attrition, and the other, retention. First, the researcher

sought to understand what existing literature reported about why teachers are leaving the

profession (teacher attrition). During the next phase of the literature review, the

researcher delved into what makes teachers want to stay in schools (teacher retention).

Two distinct approaches were taken to review the literature on teacher retention: first,

what districts can do to retain staff; and second, what principals can do to retain staff.

Like all other phases of this study, the literature review was grounded by the same three

research questions that were developed at the beginning of the study. Namely, why are teachers leaving? What can districts do about it? What can principals do about it?

The literature review provided voluminous amounts of information on the reasons for teacher attrition and strategies to promote teacher retention. This information provided a strong framework to understand the topic from a broad standpoint. This foundation of knowledge proved very useful for the researcher in making sense of his own research and in guiding his own practice as a principal. Even still, the researcher needed research at the local level, from his own district and others, to gain a better grasp on the problem. Thus, in February 2025, the research plan as described in previous pages, was implemented. Over the course of a month and a half in the Winter of 2025, the researcher surveyed teachers, set up a focus group, and interviewed former teachers to gain a better understanding of the topic. The results of this data collection process are analyzed in the next section of this study.

CHAPTER IV

Data Analysis and Results

The main goal of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of teacher turnover as it exists in central Pennsylvania. After an extensive review of literature on the topic on a broad scale, the researcher gathered a strong understanding of the phenomenon as it occurs nationally and internationally. However, the researcher needed to implement the data collection plan described in the previous chapter to gain a better understanding of the topic at the local level. Therefore, a mixed-methods approach was employed locally to procure both quantitative and qualitative data on the topic using three distinct data collection tools across three target groups.

The three data collection tools used in this study included a survey, a focus group, and interviews. These three tools allowed the researcher to access three specific target group's perspectives on this topic. The survey provided statistical data and some narrative data from a broad local audience that included his own school district in addition to five other school districts. The focus group provided narrative data from teachers currently employed in his own district, and the interviews provided narrative data from teachers who had left the district. Each data collection tool included teachers from a variety of grade bands, certification areas, and career points. While each tool targeted a different group of participants, each tool focused on the same three research questions that were established from the very start of this study. The goal of this chapter is to present the data and results found through the data collection process in a manner that is both understandable and relates back to the three basic research questions.

Data Analysis

The researcher took several methodical steps through the data analysis process. First, information from each data collection tool was reviewed separately from each other. Second, as information from each data collection tool was reviewed, the researcher used the research questions in order to locate information that was pertinent in answering the research questions.

Survey Analysis

The first data collection tool to be implemented and analyzed was a survey created through Google Forms and sent via email to several school districts on February 3, 2025, and ending on February 14, 2025. In all, 132 current teachers from six different school districts in central Pennsylvania responded to the survey. In general, the survey provided numerical data, but it also contained open-ended questions to provide some narrative data.

Demographic information about the participants can be found in the previous chapter, whereas statistical analysis is tabulated in this chapter as a result of the participants' responses to the questions pertaining to teacher turnover. The survey itself was organized by questions that provided information for each of the three main research questions. Organizing the survey by each of the three research questions kept the researcher focused through the data analysis process. The Google Forms web application created pie charts and provided percentages based on the statistical data collected in the survey. This allowed the researcher to quickly observe the data that was obtained. Survey participants were also given the opportunity to provide narrative responses to each of the three research questions. These responses were uploaded to the AI program

Dovetail, which summarized responses by themes. This enabled the researcher to dive into the responses to observe the participants' quotes that best reflected the overall feelings of survey participants. Finally, the researcher was able to compare and contrast teacher attitudes across districts by filtering the data set created by the survey. The researcher was first able to filter all of the responses provided by teachers from other districts; then he filtered out the responses from teachers in his own district. The data was entered into Dovetail, which provided a statistical breakdown of each data set for further analysis.

Focus Group Analysis

The focus group occurred on February 25, 2025. Ten teachers from the researcher's own district participated in the focus group via Zoom. The focus group was moderated by an honest broker who was a recent doctoral student and works for the local intermediate unit. After the focus group was completed, the honest broker sent an audio file to the researcher for analysis. The researcher took several steps to analyze the data provided by the focus group. The first step was to simply listen to the audio and take notes. The researcher listened to the audio several times, made notes of the key themes, and tallied common themes. Second, the data was uploaded to Dovetail which transcribed the data. This allowed the researcher to go back through the transcribed document to review common themes and revisit key quotes pertaining to the research questions. In the results section, participant quotes are shared representing the common themes found in the focus group. As with the survey, the researcher used the research questions to guide the data analysis process.

Interview Analysis

The researcher interviewed seven teachers who had left his school district within the last four years. These interviews provided another unique perspective on teacher turnover, through the eyes of those who left the school district. The researcher interviewed three elementary teachers, three middle school teachers, and one high school teacher, which also provided a district-wide view of teacher turnover. To analyze the data, the researcher took notes during each interview and later coded the notes for common themes. The researcher then uploaded each recorded interview to the AI transcription service Dovetail. The researcher reviewed these transcripts searching for and tallying common themes for each of the three research questions. Finally, quotes were found that best represented the common themes that shined through in the interview participants' responses.

Results

A large amount of data existed from the data collection process. The data consisted of survey results with 132 responses to nearly 20 questions, an hour-long focus group with 10 participants, and nearly seven hours of recorded, transcribed interviews. To remain focused, the researcher analyzed each data set one by one looking at responses relevant to each research question. Throughout this section, results are presented from each data set as they pertain to the three basic research questions.

Research Question #1:

The first research question focuses on teacher attrition. It asks, "What are the main reasons teachers want to leave public schools in central Pennsylvania, and how does

this compare or contrast with the researcher's own school district?" The survey results are presented first, followed by focus group results, and finally interview results.

Survey Results for R1.

Research Question #1 has two parts. The first part of the question is looking for information from the greater population of teachers in central Pennsylvania, while the second part of the question looks to compare results from the wider population to his own school district. When delving into this research question, the researcher first sought to understand the pervasiveness of teacher retention in central Pennsylvania as a whole. In this regard, 86.4% of respondents claimed that they worked closely with someone who left their district in the past three years. This is pictured in Figure 4 below.

Figure 4

Participants Who Worked Closely with A Colleague Who Left

I have worked closely with someone who has left my current district over the past three years.
132 responses
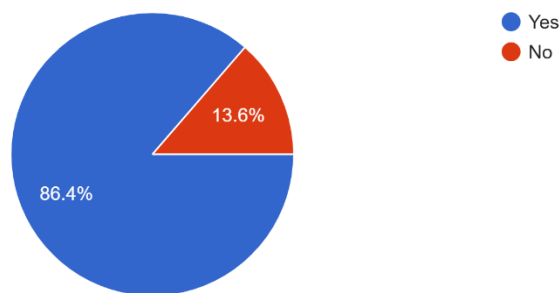
Participants went on to explain that not only did they have a colleague who had left their district, but they had also thought about or actively sought employment outside of their current role. Figure 5 reflects those who thought about leaving their current role.

Figure 5

Participants Who Considered Leaving Their Current Role

I have considered looking for a job outside of my current district over the past three years.
132 responses
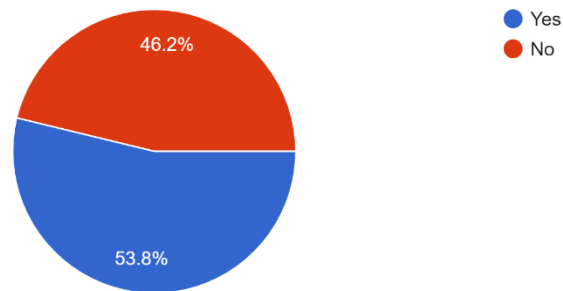
Figure 6, by contrast, shows that far less participants actively sought employment

outside of their current role.

Figure 6

Participants Who Actively Sought a New Position

I have actively sought employment outside my current district or left a traditional public teaching
role over the past three years.
132 responses
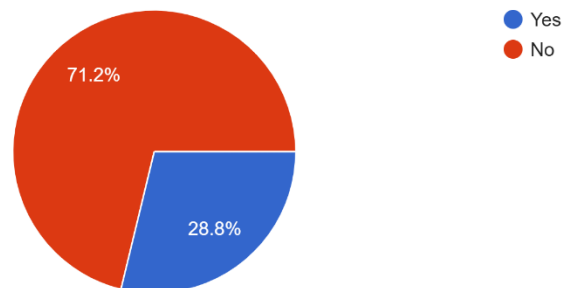
In general, the numerical figures provide data showing that a majority of teachers

in central Pennsylvania either knew someone who left or considered leaving themselves.

On the other hand, the data demonstrates that far fewer have actively sought alternative

employment. Figure 7 adds that many teachers can still see themselves staying in their

current role through retirement.

Figure 7

Participants Who Can See Themselves Retiring in Their Current Role

I can see myself retiring in my current district.
132 responses
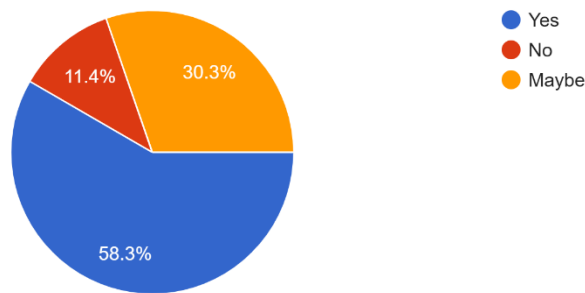
These statistics provide a strong sense of just how pervasive teacher attrition was

in central Pennsylvania at the time of the study, but still more information was needed on

why teachers wanted to leave their teaching positions. Therefore, if participants

expressed the desire to leave their current role, they were asked to explain why they

wanted to leave. The researcher provided several common reasons for attrition in the

survey, but participants had the ability to provide their own reasons for leaving. Teachers

then chose three of the most common reasons for attrition. Table 2 displays the most

common reasons that central Pennsylvania teachers said they wanted to leave their

current teaching role.

Table 2

Why Teachers Say They Want to Leave

Reasons for Wanting to Leave	Percentage of Responses
More Money	22.0%
Dissatisfaction with the School District	7.6%
Dissatisfaction with Building Leadership	7.6%
Change of Location	6.1%
Dissatisfaction with Teaching Altogether	4.5%
Other	11.3%

Note. 40.9% of respondents did not consider or actively seek another position, and therefore did not provide a reason for wanting to leave.

"More Money" had the highest percentage of responses out of all the reasons shown for wanting to leave in Table 2. Dissatisfaction, on any level, whether it was with the district, building leadership, or the profession itself, equaled 19.7% of responses when totaled together. For the "Other" category, participants responded in their own words with their reason for wanting to leave. Responses in the other category included those who expressed a combination of both frustration and wanting more money, increased stress and workload, and seeking other opportunities.

Many of the participants mentioned low salary, lack of respect for the profession, and lack of administrative support as reasons for wanting to leave their current district. One participant stated, "It is really difficult to survive making the pay that I do." Some participants specifically mentioned being frustrated with student behavior which led to feeling ineffective or stressed. One participant noted "dealing with behavioral issues and

lack of respect from the students," while another mentioned "feeling ineffective and mentally exhausted" from dealing with student behaviors. Others noted that neighboring districts offered higher salaries, which tempted them to seek employment there. One teacher said, "Other districts pay their top teachers approximately $20,000-$30,000 more." Still others remained frustrated with the profession in general. "Teachers are disrespected and expected to be magicians with little compensation."

The second part of Research Question #1 looked to compare teacher attitudes about attrition from other school districts with the researcher's own district. In total, 101 teachers from other school districts responded to the survey, and 31 teachers from the researcher's own district responded to the survey. The researcher filtered each data set and uploaded both data sets separately to the Dovetail AI summarizer to look for key insights from both data sets. Roughly 42% of respondents from the researcher's district actively sought other employment versus just 25% of teachers from other school districts. Of those who considered or sought outside employment in other districts, 20% were looking for higher salaries, 20% were dissatisfied in some way (principal, district leadership, profession), and others were looking for a variety of other reasons, including change of location and less stress. In the researcher's own district, 32% said they were seeking higher salaries, 19% were dissatisfied in some way, and the remainder were looking for a variety of other reasons. Table 3 shows how teachers from other school districts responses compared with responses from the researcher's own school district. It should be noted that the sample sizes are very different, so the percentages cannot be adequately compared. One participant accounts for approximately 3% of the respondents

in the researcher's district, and one participant accounts for about 1% among the

respondents in all other districts.

Table 3

Comparison of Why Teachers Want to Leave

Reasons for Wanting to Leave	Other Districts in Study (*n=101*)	Researcher's District (*n=31*)
More Money	19%	32%
Dissatisfaction with the School District	9%	3%
Change of Location	7%	3%
Dissatisfaction with Building Leadership	6%	13%
Dissatisfaction with Teaching Altogether	5%	3%
Other	8%	20%

Note. 46% of teachers from other districts did not consider seeking or actively seek

another position, and 26% of respondents from the researcher's district fell into this same

category. These respondents did not provide a reason for wanting to leave.

Several items could also be gleaned from the qualitative portion of the survey

when comparing the two data sets. Teachers in other districts and the researcher's district

both said that salary was the number one action that could be taken at the district level to

keep teachers. Teachers from both data sets also mentioned increased planning time and

reducing non-instructional duties as incentives to stay. As far as principal actions,

teachers in other school districts were more likely to mention administrative support for

student discipline, while teachers from the researcher's district mostly mentioned

improving the overall climate through visibility, communication, and valuing staff.

Focus Group Results for R1. The focus group provided current teachers'

perspectives on teacher attrition from the researcher's own district. Some key insights

were derived from specific questions pertaining to this topic. Six teachers in the focus

group mentioned feeling overworked. Specifically, several noted that covering classes

was a major issue, and one teacher brought up paperwork. One participant explained

the issue of coverage and compensatory time, "We are asked to cover and cover and

cover, and then we can only get one sick day now." Another teacher added that this

takes away time teachers need for collaboration. "Well, to add to the coverage…we

are losing our planning to collaborate with them, we're never together." Four teachers

mentioned that they did not feel valued by current administration. "Just going to say

that we often feel very unappreciated," a teacher stated, and another added, "We're

never told that we do something right, but we're often told when we are not doing

something right." Student behavior concerns were also mentioned by multiple

teachers. "We're seeing the behavior issues in the classrooms and sadly, it sounds like in

some buildings issues are not being dealt with appropriately." To summarize, teachers

cited several reasons for teacher attrition in the focus group. Feeling overworked and

stressed due to non-instructional duties, covering classes, and loss of prep time were

discussed by multiple participants. Several other teachers mentioned feeling

unappreciated by administration. Finally, behavioral issues not being handled

appropriately were also mentioned as another factor for teachers leaving.

Interview Results for R1. The interviews provided a third perspective of teacher

attitudes on attrition: that of teachers who have left the researcher's own district. Three

of the seven interview participants left traditional public schools to teach in a smaller

Christian environment. Three of the seven teachers left to work in a much larger school

district, which offers higher salaries, increased benefits, and improved working

conditions (as they explain). One of the seven participants left K-12 public education

altogether to pursue a career in coaching an NCAA sport. Several other potential

interview candidates who left traditional public education to teach at cyber charter

schools were contacted to participate, but they declined.

When reviewing the notes and interview transcripts, several common themes

came to light as reasons for leaving. Three participants specifically mentioned salary as a

reason for leaving. These happened to be the same participants who left their roles to

move to a much larger school district. Not all participants placed the sole blame for low

salaries on district leadership. Two interviewees were frustrated with the union

leadership during past contract negotiations. The three participants who left for smaller

Christian schools mostly took pay cuts in their new roles. They specifically mentioned

some level of frustration with public education. These participants left for philosophical

reasons rather than monetary reasons. One of these respondents, in particular, mentioned

the Covid 19 Pandemic as a major catalyst for his exit, citing changes with online

learning. He stated, "Technology is great…but technology can never take the place of a

live teacher." The two other participants in this group noted more frustrations with the

one-size-fits-all approach to public education. One participant was frustrated with a

"conveyor-belt approach" to educating students on a mass scale, while the other

participant lamented the freedom to do more hands-on projects outside the standard

curriculum.

One common thread throughout all of the interviews was that some level of frustration was listed as a reason for leaving. Five of the seven interview participants clearly stated that they were frustrated with at least one aspect of their former role. One participant explained that teachers are not just leaving because of pay, but because they feel undervalued. She stated, "I believe public ed is losing really, really good people, not because of pay…people need to feel validated, heard." Other noted frustrations included valuing teacher's time, ongoing student behavioral issues, implementing changes too quickly, and placing too much emphasis on testing and data. In sum, while a few participants noted salary as a reason for leaving, more teachers noted some level of frustration with public education or their former role specifically.

Research Question #2

While the first research question looked at why teachers wanted to leave, the next two research questions focused on what could be done to get them to stay. Research Question #2 asks, "What working conditions promote teacher retention?" First, the researcher looked at what could be done at the district level by improving working conditions to promote teacher retention.

Survey Results for R2. The survey provided a broader perspective on district-driven retention strategies from the wider population of teachers in central Pennsylvania. A survey question in this category asked participants to rank the top three actions school districts could take to improve teacher retention. According to survey participants, the three most popular actions included salary increases, offering performance incentives, and providing more time for planning. Table 4 below provides a breakdown of the most common actions teachers felt school districts could take to promote teacher retention.

Table 4

Top Actions School Districts Can Take to Promote Retention

Action Taken by the District	Percentage of Responses
Increase Salary	90.9%
Provide More Time for Planning	58.3%
Offer Performance Incentives or Bonuses	31.1%
Decrease Requirements and Paperwork	30.3%
Improve Fringe Benefits	29.5%
Provide More and Better Resources	25.8%
Adjust the School Calendar	12.9%

No other responses to this question tallied more than 10% and were therefore omitted from the chart. These categories included improving professional development, improving onboarding, improving school safety, and improving building and grounds.

Again, teachers were given the opportunity to provide a narrative explanation for their thoughts on district level support and/or teacher working conditions. These responses were uploaded into the AI program Dovetail which looked for connections in these responses. When asked what the single most important action a district could take to promote teacher retention, a majority of participants again pointed to increasing salaries.

Conversely, many other participants mentioned more planning time, reducing paperwork, and improving school climate. Some notable quotes from participants included one teacher from the researcher's district who expressed several of these concerns. "Teachers are often overwhelmed. If we had more planning time, and smaller

classes, and in general more support from the district, it would help lower stress levels." Teachers from two other districts added, "The responsibilities are becoming more intensive and overwhelming with no incentives or increase in pay," and "I am personally overwhelmed some days with not having enough time to prep for all my classes and grade papers." To summarize, although most teachers mentioned increased salaries, many added that other factors do play a key role in teacher retention.

Focus Group Results for R2. The focus group shed light on 10 current teachers' thoughts on district retention strategies. The focus group specifically looked to gain opinions from the researcher's own district. Several positive aspects about the district were shared that could be seen as reasons for retention. Five teachers mentioned that they enjoyed their small community of teachers. Four teachers said they enjoy working in the district because they live here, and two participants added that their children attend here. One teacher added that the district provides flexibility that other districts may not provide.

Other teachers explained that the district, as a whole, could implement other retention strategies. One teacher brought up the issue of pay. "I have to work every night during the week to make money just to live comfortably." The same participant lamented a meager raise for earning a master's degree in comparison with other districts. Other teachers added that the retirement and benefits are not what they once were. "Like, whenever I first started here, which was a long time ago, it was the pension, and now it's just not a thing really anymore." Post-retirement insurance was mentioned too. "But to have a school district that offers coverage after retirement versus does not. That could, that can sway people to, to go to other districts."

More time for planning, professional development, paperwork, and collaboration were all seen as district-level factors that could promote teacher retention. One teacher expanded on the issue of time, "All the paperwork that takes away from that time that you want to spend and work with the kids." Providing professional development that is relevant and providing time to implement what they learned were seen as helpful. One teacher explained that in-service days are often too busy. "I need time in my classroom to process, process and work on trying to do some of these things that they're telling us." Another teacher added, "A lot of times teachers are covering during planning periods, so we don't have a guaranteed planning period." Overall, focus group participants shared that increasing salary, adding fringe benefits, providing relevant professional development, and protecting teachers' time were the most important district-level retention strategies.

Interview Results for R2. The interviews homed in on the attitudes of teachers who had left the researcher's district. Four participants specifically mentioned increasing salaries as a method for retaining teachers. One participant explained, "Had the salary been, like I said, more competitive, then I may have been compelled to stay and keep those friendships." Another added about salary, "Like with salaries, there's no way you're retaining people for the long haul." Five participants noted valuing time as a retention strategy, with three mentioning the teacher's schedule or school calendar and two mentioning after-school duties or meetings. Having to cover classes and losing preparation periods was mentioned by at least three participants. One participant explained, "And it came down to, … the covering as much as we have it. You feel like you cover all that time." These participants felt like steps could be taken at the district-

level to alleviate coverage issues and add preparation time back into teacher schedules. They noted teachers feeling overwhelmed by their workloads and this problem being exacerbated by after-school meetings. A few felt frustrated that teachers were expected to stay until four o'clock when a meeting ended at 3:30, just to fulfill a time requirement. "If we were supposed to go till four, we had to stay till 4, …whether we were done with the task at 3:30 or not."

Several participants brought up the need to feel valued and trusted as professionals. Having some level of autonomy was seen as very important. "I felt like classroom autonomy was a big deal. You know, the ability to have trust." In this same vein, four teachers brought up the issue of a relaxed dress code. In their new roles, these people said they felt more comfortable and felt they were treated more like professionals because they now have the freedom to dress as they prefer each day. One teacher described it this way, "For instance, where I work now, I can wear jeans on most days, and it doesn't make me lesser of a teacher by any means." Two participants mentioned professional development as important steps that could be taken by district administration. These two participants noted how unequipped young teachers are at handling the challenges of a modern classroom. They specifically focused on the lack of teacher training on behavior management, handling students with disabilities, and dealing with poverty. According to one interviewee, "I just don't think colleges are preparing [education] students for what teaching is truly." Another added, "Teach these college kids, like how to manage certain behaviors and give them scenarios." Overall, while money was offered by most as an important strategy for school districts to improve

retention, strategies that improve teacher autonomy, time, and professional development were also mentioned as district-level strategies for retaining teachers.

Research Question #3

The final portion of the study focused on what could be done at the building level to promote teacher retention. Research Question #3 asks, "What forms of support do teachers need from principals to promote retention?" Here again, multiple perspectives were gained from analysis of information provided by each data collection tool.

Survey Results for R3. In the survey, teachers from the researcher's district and surrounding districts were asked to rank the top three supports principals could provide at the building level to promote teacher retention. A wider range of responses was provided for this question than Research Question #2, which focused on district level actions. Table 5 provides a breakdown of the most important principal supports that promote teacher retention according to survey participants.

Table 5

Top Principal Supports That Promote Teacher Retention

Type of Support	Percentage of Responses
Support Teachers through Student Discipline	73.5%
Provide More Time for Planning and Collaboration	52.3%
Be More Visible	32.6%
Allow More Teacher Freedom	29.5%
Communicate More Frequently	29.5%
Address Staff Issues More Frequently and Fairly	28%
Adjust the Schedule	13.6%
Evaluate Staff in a Different Way	10.6%

As can be seen in the table above, support for teachers through student discipline was the most commonly listed action that a principal could take to promote teacher retention. Providing more time for planning was another commonly chosen support, and that corresponds with participants' responses for the same support at the district level. Several other actions were ranked in the top three by nearly one-third of respondents. These supports included being visible, communicating more frequently, allowing teacher autonomy, and addressing staff issues more frequently or fairly. The survey allowed participants to give their own ideas for principal support, but many of the responses seemed similar to the supports already listed. A few respondents mentioned that their principals do a great job already and that they do not blame principals for teacher turnover.

Survey respondents were asked to elaborate on what they saw as the most important supports that principals could provide to promote teacher retention. Most respondents noted that the principal's support for teachers in student behavior management was pivotal in promoting retention. Teachers mentioned that failure to handle behavioral problems consistently and deferring to parents for student discipline were seen as negative actions by principals. One respondent stated, "Teachers need to feel their classroom is important. By issuing fair, balanced discipline, it gives them this feeling."

In addition to behavior support, being visible and communicating effectively were also commonly noted by teachers as effective principal supports. One teacher from the researcher's district stated, "Being visible is key! When you are more visible, some of the other actions/supports will fall into place on their own." Plus, a teacher from another district mentioned the importance of visibility. "More visibility of a principal equals easier approachability which leads to a better professional rapport between a teacher and an administrator as well as the students." Still, other participants displayed a disdain for principals who stifle teacher autonomy through micromanagement. One teacher specifically stated, "Show us we are appreciated without micromanaging us or making more work for us," and another response stated, "Teacher freedom, trust us to complete our jobs in a manner that suits us personally and for the children." In sum, respondents provided a wide variety of principal actions to promote teacher retention. Discipline was by far the most commonly listed support, but visibility, communication, culture, and providing autonomy were also commonly listed principal supports.

Focus Group Results for R3. Focus group participants from the researcher's district also shared opinions about how principals can impact teacher retention. Showing teachers they are valued and appreciated topped the list of these suggested strategies. Multiple teachers agreed that it makes a big difference when they feel valued by their supervisor. According to one participant, "I think more recognition from the admin team. I think that a little compliment or a little something, it does go a long way." In a more positive light, one teacher shared how her principal's actions encouraged her. "He tells us we're doing a good job. He sends us emails to keep up the good work, you know, what you're doing matters. And so, I mean, that just helps for your own mentality, for your own mental health."

Visibility was seen as an important principal action as well. One participant stated, "Be seen. There's weeks I go without even seeing my principal." Another teacher expanded on that statement by saying, "I do think visibility is a huge thing. Just being present in the halls." Other key principal actions that were mentioned in the focus group included support for student discipline, handling difficult parents, communicating well, and allowing teacher autonomy. One of the most important and final factors mentioned was trust. According to one teacher, "If we don't trust our administrators, then how can we then feel supported?" Multiple teachers agreed that trust is built from being authentic and genuine, and that it shouldn't be forced. They noted that once trust is lost, it is very difficult to get it back.

To close, many of the items discussed in the focus group matched the results from the survey. Teachers cited low salaries, behavioral issues, and frustrations as reasons for attrition. Teachers explained that increasing salaries and benefits could promote

retention, but they also explained that salaries were not the sole factor in retention.

Teachers noted that protecting their time was a very important district-level strategy for

retention. At the building level, teachers wanted to see their principal and feel supported.

More importantly, they wanted to feel valued and wanted to feel like they could trust

their immediate supervisor.

Interview Results for R3. Interview participants who had left the researcher's

district provided more insight on the topic of principal supports for teacher retention. Six

of the seven interview participants clearly stated the importance of a principal who builds

positive relationships with staff. One participant summarized this point well, "But the

key is, it's creating a relationship. And the teachers know that. That I'm there for them,"

A second participant added, "If you have developed a relationship with somebody, it's

easier to approach that person." Several participants provided strategies for principals to

build relationships. At least three interviewees noted the importance of the principal

being a visible presence in the school. One participant explained, "Being visible and

present and not just there for, you know, hey I see you twice a year when you evaluate

me." Two participants touched on the importance of an open-door policy, along with

being approachable. One of them stated, "They need to be approachable like that open

door kind of policy. They need to have teachers' backs always." At least three

participants used the same wording "have teachers' backs" in their responses, noting the

importance of principal support, especially during challenging situations. Listening to all

sides in a conflict and implementing restorative practices with staff were viewed as

important. Two responses, in particular, mentioned the importance of giving grace to

teachers in challenging situations. According to one participant, "The best thing for a

principal or someone in leadership to do is be willing to talk to each side individually and

truly listen to what that person has to say." Several interview participants discussed

times when they were challenged by a student, parent, or colleague. Interviewees

specifically mentioned that principals should be transparent and be up front with teachers

if someone has complained about them. According to one teacher, "I think also never

doing an investigation without letting the teacher know that it's being investigated, ….

Makes you feel, like, unsafe." Teachers mentioned how important it was for them to have

a principal who supported them through a challenging situation, while some regretted not

receiving as much support as they would have liked. Not being open and up front about

challenging situations was brought up as a factor that eroded trust between the teacher

and the principal.

Similar to relationship building, five of seven interviewees noted the importance

of a principal who fosters a strong sense of community. One participant summarized it

best, "I think encouraging community. Like, when you feel you're a part of a

community, you don't want to leave that." As with the district level, four interview

participants noted it is important when principals value their time, and four participants

mentioned the importance of autonomy. With time management, interviewees found

favor with principals who were flexible with teachers. They spoke highly of leaders who

allowed some flexibility with meetings, extra duties, and classroom autonomy.

Micromanagement was not viewed in a positive light. One teacher clearly stated,

"Micromanagement is a huge deterrent for teachers." A separate interviewee went on to

describe how having the freedom to try new things has allowed him to learn and grow as

a professional. "Because I've got the freedom to make those really stupid mistakes, I also have the freedom to learn," he said.

In conclusion, interview participants explained that principals play a key role in teacher retention. One participant stated, "A good leader will make anything great. Leaders matter." Interview participants described relationship building as the most important strategy for principals. In fact, they explained that relationships built on open communication, trust, and support were essential to retaining teachers. A close second behind building relationships was fostering a sense of community. Five of seven respondents mentioned the importance of a professional community. Valuing time and autonomy were also key actions mentioned by teachers during the interviews.

Triangulation of Data Sources

As described above, three data collection tools were utilized by the researcher to collect data for this study. Each tool provided a different perspective in answering the three research questions. The survey provided both quantitative and qualitative data based on teachers inside and outside the researcher's own district. The focus group provided qualitative data summarizing perspectives of current teachers within the researcher's own district. And finally, the interviews added the narrative perspectives of those who have left the researcher's district since the Covid 19 Pandemic. Using several different tools across several different target groups provided key answers to the same researcher questions. Seeking perspectives from multiple target groups allowed the researcher to find common threads in responses which transcended each target group. Since multiple population samples demonstrated common responses to the same research questions, the answers to these questions can be verified across multiple sources. This

provides a much better likelihood that the common themes brought to light by this research are, in fact, a strong representation of the teacher turnover issue in central Pennsylvania, as well as what strategies can be used to combat it.

Summary

Three distinct data sets were analyzed and presented in this chapter, providing a wealth of information. Each data set was analyzed independently and organized by each of the three main research questions. Research Question #1 focused on why teachers are leaving their positions. Initial quantitative data showed that a majority of teachers know someone who has left their position or thought about leaving their teaching position. On the contrary, other results showed that less teachers have actively looked for another job, and a majority can still see themselves staying until retirement.

More money was listed by the most survey respondents on why teachers are leaving, but some level of frustration was a close second when three categories were combined. When comparing other districts to the researcher's district, more money was still listed as the most common reason for leaving. Frustration, in general, was the second most cited reason, and this percentage was very similar across districts when adding three categories together. Other statistics on attrition were not exactly similar when comparing other districts to the researcher's own. Focus group participants and interview participants both added that more money was a major reason for teachers leaving. Other common reasons for leaving among all three data sets were lack of support for student discipline and lack of rapport between administrators and teachers.

Research Question #2 looked at what districts could do to keep teachers. Once again, raising salaries was commonly listed across all three data sets as a primary strategy

for teacher retention. Survey participants also mentioned performance incentives as another factor that could retain teachers. All three data sets showed a common thread among teachers wanting more time for planning and preparation. Teachers across all three data sets also mentioned the importance of providing necessary resources and reducing the overall workload.

Research Question #3 looked at what principals could do to retain teachers. The top supports listed in the survey included support for student discipline, valuing teachers' time, and being visible. Each of those supports were also mentioned by participants in the other two data sets. Interview participants focused more strongly on principal-teacher relationships and supporting teachers in challenging situations; however, many of the challenging situations mentioned involved disciplinary issues.

In this chapter, information from all three data sets was presented, but conclusions have yet to be drawn. In the final chapter conclusions will be drawn based on all of this information to answer each of the three research questions. Common links between all three data sets will be examined, while key differences will also be explained. Finally, recommendations to combat turnover will be presented, limitations of the research will be examined, and suggestions for further research will be offered.

CHAPTER V

Conclusions and Recommendations

Teacher turnover is a major issue facing schools, especially since the Covid 19 Pandemic in 2020. Across the nation, teachers are either moving schools, or they are seeking other professions all together. Schools in central Pennsylvania are not immune to this problem. At one time, most teachers in central Pennsylvania stayed in their positions until retirement. Today, less teachers are choosing that option.

Teacher turnover creates a variety of problems for school districts. First and most importantly, students receive less quality instruction when experienced teachers are replaced by less experienced teachers. Institutional knowledge about the school and its curricula are lost when a teacher leaves. The remaining colleagues are left to pick up the slack for teachers who have left, either by training a new teacher or by picking up new classes, students, and responsibilities. Administrators must dedicate their time and energy to replacing, training, and onboarding new teachers. This is becoming increasingly difficult due to a shortage of teachers now entering the profession. Finally, replacing teachers comes with a price tag for each school district. These costs are associated with hiring, training, onboarding, and mentoring new teachers.

The main goals of this study were to examine the main causes of teacher turnover in central Pennsylvania, including the researcher's own district, and to find out what school districts and principals can do about it. This chapter will draw conclusions to the three research questions based on an extensive review of literature and data analysis from the survey, focus group, and interviews.

Conclusions

This was a phenomenological study, wherein the researcher asked questions to better understand the phenomenon of teacher turnover and what can be done to promote teacher retention. After reviewing the entirety of information from this study, several key findings came to light regarding the research questions.

Research Question #1

What are the main reasons teachers want to leave public schools in central Pennsylvania, and how does this compare or contrast with the researcher's own school district? This question focuses on why teachers are leaving, commonly known as teacher attrition. Through this question, the researcher first sought to understand why teachers are leaving on a broad scale, in his region, and in his own school district. Then, the researcher sought to understand if the reason teachers are leaving his district are the same reasons teachers are leaving other districts across his region.

Teachers Want More Money. Teachers are leaving for higher pay. In every part of the research process, the most commonly cited reason for teacher attrition was low pay. Looking back on the literature, 93% of 2,000 teachers in one study listed low pay as their reason for leaving (Harris, et al., 2019). Other studies showed that teachers earn 26.6% less than their counterparts with similar degrees (Allegretto, 2024), and that the average student borrows over $30,000 to complete a four-year degree program (Hanson, 2024). Therefore, on a national level, it is very clear that many teachers are leaving due to dissatisfaction with their salary.

Among central Pennsylvania teachers who participated in the survey portion of this study, 19% said more money was their reason for seeking other employment. In the

researcher's own district, that figure was much higher at 32%, or nearly one-third of respondents. Money was mentioned several times in the other data collection tools as well. The focus group targeted teachers currently working in the researcher's district. Salary was not a major part of the focus group conversation, but two teachers specifically brought it up. One teacher talked about needing to work extra jobs every night just to make ends meet. The interview process focused on teachers who have left the researcher's district. Three of the seven teachers interviewed stated higher pay was one of their main reasons for leaving. All three of these teachers left the researcher's small district for a larger district with a higher tax base.

Teachers Feel Unsatisfied and Unsupported. Teachers feel unsupported in their work and unsatisfied in their roles. While money was the most commonly mentioned reason for leaving, it was not the only reason why teachers wanted to leave. Many teachers who left the district noted that had they been satisfied with their work, they may have considered staying for less money. Feelings of support from colleagues and administration are frequently mentioned by teachers as key elements in job satisfaction. In particular, support for student discipline issues was a very important factor for teachers. If teachers felt like students behaved and respected them, they reported feeling much happier in their position. Becker and Grob (2021) noted that teachers make a cost-benefit analysis when deciding to leave by comparing the amount of money they make with how much support they receive and if they like their job.

In central Pennsylvania at large, 20% of teachers cited some form of dissatisfaction as a reason for looking for a new position. The researcher's own district showed similar figures, with 19% mentioning some form of dissatisfaction with the job

other than salary. Interestingly enough, a number of respondents responded "other" and provided a more detailed response with some combination of money and frustration. In the focus group, four teachers specifically mentioned not feeling valued by administration as a reason that teachers seek employment elsewhere. In the interview process, five of the seven teachers mentioned some level of frustration as one of their reasons for leaving. One participant clearly stated that public schools are losing good people because teachers don't feel heard or validated.

Teachers Are Stressed. Teachers are feeling overwhelmed. Teachers report that the workload, especially for non-instructional duties, has grown over the years. Extra paperwork, coverage, and an overemphasis on standardized testing have all been listed as common stressors for teachers. One study showed that 30% of teachers have experienced clinically significant anxiety because of state testing policies (Farmer, 2020). Another researcher stated, "Stress is one of the clearest predictors of teacher attrition" (Ryan et al., 2017, p. 3).

Teachers in central Pennsylvania agreed. One teacher from the survey expressed "feeling ineffective and mentally exhausted" in her work. Six out of ten teachers in the focus group mentioned feeling overworked. Specifically, coverage was a major point of contention that added to teachers feeling overworked and stressed in the focus group. In the interviews, the same sentiment about coverage was shared by those who had left the researcher's own district. Interview participants mentioned an overemphasis on data and testing, dealing with discipline issues, and after-school activities and as major causes of stress.

Covid 19 Played a Role. The Covid 19 Pandemic reshaped the landscape of education. This is supported heavily by many studies across the nation. According to a 2021 study by Diliberti et al., half of all public-school teachers cited Covid 19 as one of their reasons for leaving. Teachers in the national studies cited hybrid learning models and disrespect as causes of stress and reasons for seeking new roles. What's more, new employment opportunities arose after the pandemic both inside and outside of the educational field. The pandemic fundamentally changed the way people view the workplace. Workers across the economy, including teachers, now demand more flexibility in their schedule or have other newfound workplace expectations. Cyber education has become more prevalent. More teachers and students are moving to cyber platforms. This has created more job openings in the entire education sector, including public schools, which has caused great shifts in teachers.

Covid 19 greatly impacted the researcher's district. The pandemic itself caused great turmoil within the community. Many community members were very upset by the government's social distancing and masking policies. They shared their anger at several school board meetings, where massive crowds showed up to voice their anger. Some teachers did not feel respected or safe during this time. In addition, they were asked to teach using a hybrid model with students who had a very difficult time staying focused. Other local teachers did not agree with the government's position. In fact, a new Christian school and a new Christian homeschool platform were opened up within the community within two years of the pandemic. Several teachers, including two who participated in the interviews, left to teach at these smaller schools. Another interviewee left to form his own Christian school in another community. He clearly stated that Covid

19 was a catalyst for his career change. The rise of cyber charter schools has also

impacted the local district. Many teachers from the researcher's district as well as other

districts in central Pennsylvania have left to join cyber charter schools. This has caused a

great shift in public education and has caused openings in public schools as a result of

teachers leaving to teach in cyber charters. Thus, as supported by national studies, the

pandemic set the forces in motion that caused a great migration in teachers, whether it is

for new work altogether, cyber education, private school, or other public schools.

       Regional Versus Local Trends. Teachers in the researcher's district are mostly

leaving for the same reasons as other schools in the area, with some nuances. A higher

percentage of teachers in his district listed "more money" as a reason for leaving than at

other schools, but "more money" was the most commonly listed reason in all phases of

the study. Feelings of frustration due to lack of support showed roughly the same

percentages both regionally and locally. However, a higher percentage of teachers from

other central Pennsylvania schools cited frustration with district leadership while teachers

within the researcher's district cited frustration with building leadership at a higher rate.

Additionally, teachers in the researcher's own district specifically pointed to coverage as

a major cause of stress. Teachers in other central Pennsylvania districts cited "change of

location" more often than teachers from the researcher's district in the survey. A few

teachers from other districts mentioned the lasting impacts of Covid 19, but several

teachers have left the researcher's own district as a direct result of the pandemic. Due to

the upheaval caused by this event, its impact cannot be underestimated. Last, teachers

from the researcher's district listed a variety of other causes for leaving more so than

other districts, which shows the problem is more nuanced at the local level.

Research Question #2

What working conditions promote teacher retention? This second research question looks at what school districts can do to promote teacher retention. Most school districts do not have a never-ending pile of resources at their disposal. Finances are limited, and there is only so much support that can be provided for teachers due to limited time and resources. This section will focus on what school districts can do to promote retention.

Improve Compensation. Raising salaries is an obvious way to increase teacher retention. Over 90% of survey respondents from central Pennsylvania claimed that salary increases would increase retention. Unfortunately, schools with limited budgets cannot always raise salaries. Small, rural districts, in particular, often have smaller tax bases and cannot compete with salaries offered by larger districts. Their tax bases just cannot bear it, but there are some financial measures districts can take to promote retention. First, small districts can continue to work with local unions to keep salaries at least somewhat competitive with surrounding districts. A closer look reveals that satisfied teachers are willing to work for somewhat less pay. Therefore, if small districts can keep salaries competitive with other districts and provide other supports, it should promote retention.

In addition, other options for increasing salaries can be explored. There is a great deal of evidence that monetary performance incentives and bonuses improve retention. Both Hanushek et al. (2016) and Nguyen et al. (2020) found evidence that performance incentives or retention bonuses increase teacher retention. In central Pennsylvania, 31.1% of the teachers surveyed listed incentives or bonuses as measures that could increase retention. Over 29% percent of respondents said improving benefits like health

care and retirement incentives could help, while this same sentiment was echoed by focus group participants and interview participants. Thus, performance incentives, retention bonuses, and benefits could be lower cost methods to increase compensation and promote retention for schools with limited budgets.

        Improve Time and Efficiency. School districts can promote retention by increasing preparation time and reducing non-instructional duties. Teachers value their planning and preparation time, and they are feeling more stressed in general due to lack of time. Thompkins (2023) noted that less paperwork improves teacher job satisfaction, and Harris et al. (2019) found that over 80% of teachers in their study were overwhelmed by paperwork. To add, high numbers of teachers in this study felt like more preparation time and workload reduction would promote retention. In fact, more than half of central Pennsylvania teachers from the survey (58.3%) listed "provide more time for planning" as one of the top three district-led retention strategies. Another category showed similar attitudes about time, with 12.9% choosing "adjust the calendar or schedule." Teachers from the researcher's district were specifically frustrated with covering classes during their planning period. Six out of ten focus group participants mentioned feeling overworked, and several specifically mentioned the issue of covering classes during their planning period. Several interviewees who had left the district also mentioned the issue of coverage and lack of time to complete duties. Other interview participants cited extra duties, like after school meetings and extra paperwork as frustrations. Over 30% of central Pennsylvania teachers listed "decrease requirements and paperwork" as one of their top three district-led retention strategies. Therefore, improving efficiency, adding

preparation time, and reducing non-instructional duties can improve job satisfaction and promote teacher retention.

Improve Infrastructure and Resources. Improving infrastructure and providing resources may promote teacher retention in central Pennsylvania. Over 25% of survey respondents from across the region listed "provide more or better resources" as one of the top three district retention strategies. One teacher wrote, "I believe that giving students more and better resources, including appropriate support in the classroom will allow teachers to do their best jobs." Many more participants across the region supported that notion. Here, teachers shared that if they had the necessary resources to do their jobs, they would be more satisfied in their work and less likely to seek employment elsewhere. Furthermore, 7.6% of respondents added that improvements to buildings and grounds would help, while 6.8% listed improvements to school safety as beneficial for teacher retention. Few national studies reported these same retention strategies, but central Pennsylvania teachers noted their importance. This concern may be unique to central Pennsylvania schools because many have aging infrastructure, and some have not made modern safety adaptations.

Improve Professional Development. Many teachers in this study noted the importance of professional development for new teachers. According to Valenzuela et al. (2022, para. 1), "Approximately 10% of teachers leave within their first year, and 44% leave within five years." The process of supporting new teachers begins with a thorough hiring process and choosing the best fit for a position. One survey participant feared her district was not properly vetting candidates who were not fit for their roles. Interview participants had similar fears about new teachers. Two interview participants felt like

new teachers were not prepared to deal with the challenges of a modern classroom. One interviewee claimed, "And people get into the field and go, oh, my gosh, this isn't what I thought, and I just don't think colleges are preparing students for what teaching is truly like." Van den Borre et al. (2021) found that early-career teachers with access to professional development and mentoring programs were much more likely to remain as teachers. Approximately 8% of participants from central Pennsylvania felt like induction and onboarding programs could be improved.

In addition to new teachers, roughly 7% of survey respondents listed professional development as one of the top three district actions that could improve retention. Teachers in the focus group added to that notion. One teacher lamented that she wants to be taught about new technologies and teaching strategies, but she needs more time to practice them. She felt in-service days were just too busy with training that is not useful. Teachers from other regional districts held the same attitude. Thus, improving professional development programs, especially for new teachers, is an important district-wide strategy that could promote retention.

Research Question #3

What forms of support do teachers need from principals to promote retention? The final research question focuses on what principals can do to promote teacher retention. Principals typically do not have the power to raise salaries, reorganize professional development programs, or make large improvements to infrastructure or resources, but there are very meaningful supports that principals can employ to promote teacher retention.

Provide Disciplinary Support. Disciplinary support for student behavioral issues is one of the most pivotal strategies that principals can use to promote teacher retention. When teachers feel safe and respected, they are more likely to report job satisfaction. On a national scale, several studies, including a study authored by Shell et al. (2023), found a link between disciplinary support and teacher retention. In central Pennsylvania, 73.5% of teachers listed "support teachers through student discipline" as one of the top three teacher retention strategies. Open-ended survey responses reflected the same sentiment that student behavior management is important for teacher job satisfaction and retention. Focus group participants echoed the same feelings. One focus group participant stated, "And a lot of it [teacher attrition] has to do with behaviors of kids that are not being addressed." Two interview participants who left the researcher's district felt like teachers weren't equipped to deal with some of the behaviors they saw. They did not state their principal was lax on discipline, but they noted the impact of poor student behavior on teacher turnover. The results clearly show that disciplinary support is an important principal action to promote teacher retention.

Be Visible and Communicate. Visibility and communication are effective actions a principal can take to improve teacher retention. Fiore and Whitaker (2004) found the best principals are visible and communicate well, and this creates a positive school culture. Several other studies support these findings. According to the survey, 32.5% of central Pennsylvania teachers chose "be more visible" as one of the three most important principal supports. Another 29.5% chose "communicate more frequently" as one of their top three supports. One focus group participant regretted not seeing her principal for weeks at a time. Three interview participants brought up the importance of

the principal being a visible presence in the school. Several survey respondents expanded

on the idea of communication. One person noted, "Without communication, the school

cannot run in the most effective way for everyone, including the students." To add, many

other focus group participants stated the importance of communication and visibility in

building trusting relationship with the principal. Teachers on all levels of the research

process mentioned the importance of principals who are approachable and have an open-

door policy. Teachers expressed that successful principals were visible, communicated

well, and built strong relationships with staff.

       Build Culture and Relationships. Building a positive school culture and trusting

relationships with staff are important principal actions. Teachers are less likely to leave

when they are satisfied with the school environment and administrative support (Nguyen

et al., 2020). As the leader in the building, the principal plays a major role in creating a

positive school culture. The strategies mentioned earlier—providing discipline support,

being visible, and communicating well—all help to build a positive school culture. These

three actions help principals build trusting relationships with teachers. Teachers who

trust their principal are much more likely to be satisfied with their job. One survey

participant noted two main principal actions to promote retention, "Morale and showing

you trust us that we're professionals who do our jobs." Focus group participants from the

researcher's own district spent a great deal of time discussing the issue of trust and

relationships. Five of them specifically noted the importance of a positive school culture,

but many felt undervalued and unheard. Several interviewees who had left the district

echoed that sentiment. They also felt unheard and undervalued by administration.   Six of

seven interview participants discussed the importance of relationships, and five of seven discussed the importance of a school community.

Principals must evaluate teachers, and inevitably, they may have to address some type of personnel concern or conflict with them. In the survey, 28% felt like the principal should address staff concerns more fairly and frequently. These are often difficult situations for any principal to navigate, and sometimes these situations lead to hard feelings from staff. The researcher asked questions in the focus group and the interviews to gather feedback on these issues. Participants understood that dealing with personnel concerns can be difficult situations for principals, but they noted that principals can navigate these situations better by establishing trust with staff. Several interviewees talked about the importance of a principal who "has their back" in tough situations. A focus group participant asked, "If we don't trust our administrators, then how can we feel supported?" Therefore, building a positive school culture by building trusting relationships with staff is pivotal for principals to promote retention.

Provide Teacher Autonomy. Providing teacher autonomy is another important teacher retention strategy that can be employed by principals. Teacher autonomy is a natural result of trust. When principals trust their teachers, they are more likely to allow them more independence in the classroom. Ngyen et al. (2020) authored one of many studies showing that teacher autonomy is an important factor in teacher retention. Unfortunately, standardized testing programs have led to reduced teacher autonomy over the past twenty-five years. In central Pennsylvania, 29.5% of survey participants listed "allow more teacher freedom" as one of their top three principal supports. In the open-ended comments, many others showed disdain for principals who use micromanagement

techniques. Allowing more flexibility for teachers was specifically brought up in the

focus group. While in the interviews, four of seven participants noted the value of teacher

autonomy. Many teachers who had left the district shared that good principals trust them

to do their job without micromanaging them. To be fair, several studies have shown that

complete hands-off leadership (laissez-faire style) has a negative impact on schools, so

principals must take a balanced approach to teacher independence. Nonetheless, some

level of classroom autonomy was found to increase job satisfaction and teacher retention.

Value Teacher's Time. Showing teachers that their time is valued can have an

impact on job satisfaction and retention. Principals do not always have complete control

of the school calendar or schedule, but where possible, if the principal can support more

preparation time for teachers, it improves job satisfaction. In the survey, 52.3% of

teachers listed "provide more time for planning and collaboration" as one of the three

most important principal strategies. Teachers in the focus group and interviews echoed

that sentiment. Time covering classes, completing paperwork, or participating in other

non-instructional duties were particularly frustrating to teachers. The coverage issue was

very specific to the researcher's own district, but universally, teachers reported feeling

overwhelmed by extra duties. This has been well documented by many studies, and it

was supported at all levels of the research process in this study. In fact, five of the seven

interview participants noted time was an issue, and five of the ten focus group

participants reported feeling overworked. As Becker and Grob (2021) explain, school

leaders must protect teachers against too much paperwork and streamline processes.

While principals may not have complete control over all of these processes, the more

they can alleviate paperwork, extra duties, and wasted time, the more they will support retention.

Effective Leadership Styles for Principals. Many of the principal actions described by teachers in this study align with effective leadership styles. Various national studies show a link between certain leadership styles and teacher retention. Given this body of evidence, certain leadership styles would seemingly be more effective for principals to promote teacher retention in central Pennsylvania schools.

Principals who use distributive leadership create shared ownership among staff and empower teacher leaders in their school. Principals who utilize distributive leadership are not expected to fix all of the school's problems, but they work collectively with teachers to create a shared vision of success (Heller, 2004). In this study, central Pennsylvania teachers noted that building trusting relationships, empowering teachers, and providing teacher autonomy were important to them. Based on this information, distributive leadership would be an effective style to utilize to promote teacher retention.

Authentic leaders build relationships with people, show compassion, and listen to their employees (Western Governors University, 2020). Teachers at all levels of this study noted appreciation for principals with these qualities. Specifically, teachers mentioned the importance of visibility, communication, and building trust. They felt like a principal who was approachable and employed an open-door policy was someone they could trust as a leader. Therefore, authentic leadership would be an effective style based on the information provided by central Pennsylvania teachers.

Servant leaders share power with others, put the needs of others first, and focus on developing others to reach their highest potential (Greenleaf Center for Servant

Leadership, 2021). Several studies have shown that servant leadership has a positive impact on teacher retention. Central Pennsylvania teachers supported that concept. Many noted that improvements to professional development activities, especially for new teachers, would help them grow as professionals. Building trusting relationships is another major aspect of servant leadership. The concept of trust was brought up on numerous occasions throughout the study. Overall, servant leadership would be an effective strategy for principals to use in central Pennsylvania.

Finally, transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership were other leadership styles mentioned in national studies. There is some evidence that transactional leadership may promote teacher retention. Many teachers noted that both intrinsic and extrinsic incentives play a role in job satisfaction. Some teachers cited monetary incentives or awards for strong work, while others shared that praise from their supervisor was an intrinsic reward that improved job satisfaction. Transformational leaders are charismatic individuals who create a clear vision and build a positive culture. Teachers throughout this study noted the importance of communicating well and creating a positive school culture. Little evidence exists that laissez-faire leadership would be effective. While teachers value their independence, many noted that principals must do a better job of handling staff concerns more frequently and fairly. On the contrary, teachers in this study also showed disdain for principals who micromanaged or displayed authoritarian leadership styles. They specifically disliked principals who talked down to them or simply gave orders. Most participants valued leaders who operated in a democratic style by gathering opinions, building consensus, and empowering teachers.

Limitations

This study provided a great deal of information, but it was not without its limitations. Several school districts surrounding the researcher's district declined to participate in the study. Their participation would have provided a better picture of how teacher turnover is impacting teacher retention in the entire region. Nonetheless, five districts in addition to the researcher's district participated, which provided a mixture of small and large districts. The focus group gathered the perspective of current teachers within the researcher's district. Ten teachers participated in the focus group out of 155 total teachers. Although teachers from all schools in the district participated, it is hard to say that ten teachers represent all the teachers in the district. Seven teachers who left the district participated in the interview process. These were the seven teachers who responded to the interview request. Other teachers who had left for cyber schools or other reasons may have provided a different perspective.

It is important to consider the motives of the research participants. More participants could have been those who have strong feelings about teacher turnover, whereas teachers who are satisfied with their roles may have been less likely to participate. This could have skewed the data toward those who are unsatisfied as teachers versus those who are satisfied with their work. Lastly, this study was characterized by large amounts of information from three different sources. A major challenge for the researcher was to sort the data and present it in a meaningful way. Therefore, quotes from every participant could not be shared with the audience, nor could all statistics be shared. The researcher had to make decisions about the most representative data points to present in this report.

Recommendations

Based on this study, recommendations can be made for the researcher's school district and for future research. Each year since 2020, teacher turnover has presented a problem for the researcher's district. Just over half of the survey respondents from the region considered looking for a job outside of their current district. At the local level, the number was closer to a third of all participants. A more telling figure might be those who actively sought employment outside of their district. That number is much lower with only 28% of participants actively seeking outside employment, and the statistics are similar when looking at the local district. Another surprising figure is that nearly 90% of survey respondents said they could see themselves or could "maybe see" themselves retiring from their current district. This information shows that, perhaps, teacher turnover is not quite as pervasive as originally thought. It also shows that other districts' teachers display similar attitudes about turnover as the researcher's district. Even still, turnover remains an issue, and recommendations can be made from the results of this study.

District Recommendations

The local school district has a history of fiscal responsibility, but it is also a small, rural district in comparison with other regional districts. It does not possess a large enough tax base to compete with salaries offered by some of the larger districts and cyber charter schools in the area. However, the district should consider working with the local union to keep salaries competitive with other regional districts of a similar size. In addition, performance and retention incentives should be considered. The local district's salary schedule has many more steps than other neighboring districts. This means it takes longer for teachers to reach the top of the salary scale. Mid-career teachers have left the

district for more money. Reducing the number of steps in the salary scale would curtail that issue. Other retention strategies, like offering longevity bonuses, larger payouts for sick days, or other benefits could be lower cost ways to compensate teachers and improve retention.

Coverage is a major issue within the researcher's district. Research shows very strongly that teachers are stressed, overworked, and feel like their time is not valued. The local school district must continue to reduce teacher coverage as much as possible. Several years ago, a plan was put in place to reduce coverage. Even after that, it is still considered a problem. Common sense methods to reduce coverage could include recruiting more substitute teachers and reviewing the schedule to make coverage more equitable. The problem is not easily solved because teachers will continue to take off work, and students will need to be supervised. Nevertheless, the district must continue to look at common sense ways to reduce teacher coverage.

Improving resources, infrastructure, and safety came to light as important district-controlled retention strategies. Here, as with salaries, the district is not working with unlimited streams of funding. However, making sure teachers have what they need to be successful in the classroom should be a priority. Just recently, the district purchased several new curricular resources. Continuing to provide necessary resources will ensure teachers have what they need to feel successful and satisfied in their work.

Improvements to school infrastructure were also mentioned as effective district-retention strategies. The district recently made several important updates to its facilities, specifically for school safety. Continuing to make improvements to infrastructure, particularly to support school safety are important teacher retention strategies.

Implementing metal detectors, shatter-proof film on windows, cameras, and school visitor check-in measures are positive steps the district has taken to improve safety. In this regard, the district should continue to seek out safety and infrastructure grants to make capital improvements without overburdening taxpayers.

Improving professional development was mentioned by many teachers in the study. Several teachers at the local level said they did not feel like they had time to implement the strategies they learned. Others did not find meaning in what they learned. To be fair, the district must implement state-mandated training programs that are often unrelated to instruction. Teachers generally do not prefer these programs. The district has utilized methods to allow trade time for teachers to complete these activities on their own, so that when teachers are in the building for in-service days, it is related to instruction. The district should continue to look for methods for making in-service days meaningful. In addition, the district has improved its new teacher induction and onboarding program. The program has increased from one to two years, mentors are more closely vetted, and administrators collaborate on these training sessions. These are marked improvements that should continue to promote the retention of new teachers, and the district should continue to improve its new teacher programs.

Principal Recommendations

Principals offer a more personal touch that can alleviate teacher turnover. The researcher himself learned a great deal of high-quality information from this project. Not only will the researcher be implementing these strategies, but this information must be shared with his colleagues at the other buildings in the district.

Disciplinary support is a highly documented principal action that increases teacher retention. Principals must continue to take strides to provide discipline support for teachers. Frequently, there are misunderstandings about how discipline is handled. Principals need to do a better job of communicating how discipline issues are resolved so that teachers feel supported. In addition, principals must do a better job of training teachers on how to deal with discipline issues. If teachers have clear expectations for how to deal with discipline concerns, they are much less likely to become frustrated by these behaviors.

Teachers value principals who are visible and communicate well. They value principals who are charismatic, energetic and build a strong school community. Principals at the local level must heed this advice and continue to take these actions to build trusting relationships with teachers. Many teachers noted they did not feel heard or valued. Principals must note that teachers who feel this way are typically teachers who leave the district. Principals must then dedicate more time to community and relationship building. It is nearly inevitable that principals will need to have a difficult conversation with each staff member at some point. Principals who have built strong, trusting relationships with their staff are much more effective at having these conversations. This is not always easy. Principals need continuous training and mentoring on how to resolve conflict and have difficult conversations in an effective manner. Therefore, the researcher recommends continuous training and reflecting for principals. Partnering with other principals and reviewing scenarios are also strong methods for improving principal conflict resolution skills. Principals will not make all of their teachers happy, but by

building relationships and continuous training, they can improve their ability to connect with employees.

Leadership styles like distributive, servant, authentic, transformative, and transactional leadership should be utilized instead of authoritarian or laissez-faire styles. The principal actions discussed earlier in this chapter, including visibility, communication, and relationship building are all tenets of these suggested leadership styles. Teachers showed a strong disdain for authoritarian leaders who micromanage, give orders, and talk down to employees. Teachers are happiest when they are afforded some level of autonomy in the classroom. Even though they may not directly admit to it, teachers do not prefer a hands-off leadership style either. Teachers want a leader who will be proactive in dealing with issues and will work to solve problems, even if the problems are difficult to solve. Teachers want a leader who will reduce non-instructional duties and protect them from needless paperwork. Teachers reported time and again they just want a leader who "has their back," and who is "in it" with them. Principals, therefore, should research these noted leadership styles and work to implement effective leadership. Continuous training and experience can help principals hone their leadership abilities.

Recommendations for Future Research

Covid 19 changed the landscape of the modern workplace and the educational environment. New perspectives on the workplace have emerged since that time. Employees expect more freedom and flexibility. They value their time more. Many teachers and students alike have made the shift to cyber education platforms. This allows them to work from home, giving them more freedom. In the past, teachers were required

to dress professionally. Modern teachers are now demanding a more open dress code. To add, the school choice movement has created more job options for teachers. Many of these options were not as readily available a decade ago, or they were not financially feasible. These are all societal shifts that school districts cannot change with any one policy. It is recommended that districts continue to stay abreast of these societal changes and adapt their policies with the changing times.

Before wholesale changes are made to local educational policies, continued research is necessary in upcoming years. Will these changing workplace norms last? Will the school choice movement continue to be a factor? Will new technologies continue to change the landscape of society and how we educate our children? Will behavioral issues be more prevalent in future schools, thus making it harder to teach? The answer to all of these questions will have an impact on teacher turnover trends. Future research will need to focus on these questions to stay abreast of the teacher turnover problem and the teacher shortage in general. This research will enable school districts to adapt to the changing educational landscape and remain competitive and effective.

Summary

Teachers are changing jobs or leaving the profession for a variety of reasons. Money is the most commonly listed reason for teacher turnover; however, frustration is a close second. Teachers who are satisfied in their position because they feel supported by administration and colleagues are much less likely to seek outside employment, even for more money. Stress and feeling overworked are also commonly mentioned factors for educators leaving the profession or seeking greener pastures in other districts. Many

understand that the work may be similar elsewhere, but if they will make more money, they are more likely to seek those positions. The impact of Covid 19 on teacher turnover since 2020 cannot be underestimated. The pandemic set a plethora of forces into motion that has caused, and is still causing, large amounts of teacher turnover. Teachers in the researcher's district left for largely the same reasons as teachers in other districts with some small differences.

Increasing salaries is the number one district-led retention strategy that was mentioned by teachers in the study. Districts should consider keeping salaries competitive or offering other low-cost incentives to promote retention. Conversely, teachers throughout the study noted that money was not the only reason why teachers leave. Plus, an overwhelming amount of research shows that teachers will work for less pay if they are satisfied in their work. Teachers throughout central Pennsylvania noted that improving efficiency by adding preparation time and reducing workloads would make them more satisfied in their roles. Others stated that improving resources for teachers might be beneficial, while some noted improvements to infrastructure and safety as important. Finally, improvements to professional development, particularly for new teachers, would be helpful district-led strategies.

The researcher's school district can take many cost-effective steps to promote teacher retention. Increasing salaries is not always an option, but there are other methods to increase compensation without overburdening taxpayers. The researcher's district should continue to look at ways to reduce coverage and extra duties for teachers. This is a major cause of stress, which leads to burnout, and turnover. The district should continue to seek out ways to improve resources, infrastructure, and safety features.

Grants are a way to supplement the district's budget to help pay for these items. Last, continual improvement to the professional development program will allow the district to grow teachers as professionals to navigate the classrooms of the future.

Principals play a very important role in teacher retention. Numerous studies have pointed to the importance of principal leadership in teacher retention. Boyd et al. (2011) found that 40% of teachers in his study left due to dissatisfaction with the principal. An interview participant from this study explained, "A good leader will make anything great. Leaders matter." Participants revealed that principals must provide strong disciplinary support, build trusting relationships, and foster a positive school culture to promote teacher retention. Using leadership styles such as distributive leadership, servant leadership, and authentic leadership are beneficial, while laissez-faire and authoritarian styles are not as effective.

Principals can learn a great deal from this study. Teachers at every level stated that disciplinary support was pivotal. Teachers wanted leaders who were visible, approachable, and communicated well. They wanted leaders who developed trust and a strong sense of community. Leadership styles that promoted these types of actions generally promoted job satisfaction, whereas authoritarian styles generally produced unhappiness among staff.

The modern landscape of education and the workplace is rapidly changing. The rise of the school choice movement, distance learning platforms, and artificial intelligence have changed the way society views education. The local public school is no longer the only educational option. Teachers and students can and will choose other options if they are unsatisfied. Societal expectations about the workplace have also

changed drastically. Teachers, like other employees, demand more freedom and flexibility. Public schools have traditionally been characterized by standardized schedules and rigid expectations, like employee dress codes. These traditional expectations run counter to modern expectations about the workplace. It has to be considered that these societal changes have impacted teacher turnover. While ongoing research will be needed to stay abreast of these changing norms, this study provided valuable information on the current state of teacher turnover in central Pennsylvania. Conclusions garnered from this study and recommendations for addressing teacher turnover will be beneficial for the researcher's district, principals, and other schools in promoting teacher retention.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

IRB Approval

Institutional Review Board
250 University Avenue
California, PA 15419
instreviewboard@calu.edu
Melissa Sovak, Ph.D.

Dear Shane,

Please consider this email as official notification that your proposal titled "Teacher Attrition and Retention in central Pennsylvania: What Can School Districts and Principals Do To Promote Teacher Retention?" (Proposal #PW24-021) has been approved by the Pennsylvania Western University Institutional Review Board as submitted.

The effective date of approval is 07/29/2024 and the expiration date is 07/28/2025. These dates must appear on the consent form.

Please note that Federal Policy requires that you notify the IRB promptly regarding any of the following:

(1) Any additions or changes in procedures you might wish for your study (additions or changes must be approved by the IRB before they are implemented)

(2) Any events that affect the safety or well-being of subjects

(3) Any modifications of your study or other responses that are necessitated by any events reported in (2).

(4) To continue your research beyond the approval expiration date of 07/28/2025, you must file additional information to be considered for continuing review. Please contact instreviewboard@calu.edu

Please notify the Board when data collection is complete.

Regards,

Melissa Sovak, PhD.
Chair, Institutional Review Board

APPENDIX B

Informed Consent

Informed Consent to Participate in a Survey

Title of Study: TEACHER ATTRITION AND RETENTION IN CENTRALPENNSYLVANIA: WHAT CAN SCHOOL DISTRICTS AND PRINCIPALS DO TOPROMOTE TEACHER RETENTION?
KEY INFORMATION
You are being asked by Shane Cowher to participate in a research study. Participation in the study is voluntary, and you may stop anytime.
The purpose of the study is to gain a better understanding of why teachers want to leave their current school or traditional public schools entirely. The researcher is seeking to understand what districts can do, as whole, to promote teacher retention, and the researcher is seeking to understand what principals can do to promote teacher retention. For research purposes, you will be asked to name the school district in which you are employed, but the name of the district will be kept confidential in the results of the study. In this study, you will be asked to answer survey questions about your attitudes about teacher attrition and retention. You will be asked to answer questions regarding your attitudes regarding job qualities that promote teacher retention in traditional public schools. You will be asked to answer questions about your perspectives on leadership styles that promote teacher retention.
It will take about 5-10 minutes to complete the study.
The potential risks during the study are relatively low but could include breach of confidentiality or nervousness/ anxiety answering questions about your place of employment or seeking alternate employment. Remember, you may stop taking the survey at any time. In addition, if you feel the need to talk with someone, you may contact the PennWest Edinboro counseling center at 814-732-2252, or for emergencies, call 814-732-2911.
There are no direct benefits to participants from this research. It will help researchers better understand the problem of teacher attrition in central Pennsylvania public schools.
SECURITY OF DATA
The online study is completely anonymous; you will not be asked to give any information that could identify you (e.g., name). The survey is NOT linked to IP addresses. Individual responses will not be presented, just the aggregated data. Remember, taking part in this study is voluntary. If, while taking the survey, you feel uncomfortable or no longer want to participate, you may stop at any time. To stop taking the survey, you may either:
(1) proceed to the last page of the survey and press "Submit," or (2) if you wish toexit the survey, close your browser completely.
There are no consequences if you decide to stop participating in this study.
There is no identifiable information collected from you during this study; all other information from this study will be confidential within local, state, and federal laws. The PennWest University Institutional Review Board (IRB) may review the research records. The study results may be shared in aggregate form at a meeting or journal, but there is no

identifiable information to be revealed. The records from this study will be maintained for a minimum of three (3) years after the study is complete.

Your information collected in this research *will not* be used or distributed for future research, even if all your identifiers are removed.

If you have questions about the research or a research-related injury, you can contact Dr. Mary Wolf at wolf@pennwest.edu. If you have a question about your rights as a research participant that you need to discuss with someone, you can contact the PennWest University Institutional Review Board at InstReviewBoard@pennwest.edu.

If you would like a copy of this informed consent, please print this screen or contact Shane Cowher at cow02722@pennwest.edu.

By clicking on the "I agree" box and continuing with the survey, you have acknowledged that you have read the informed consent and are at least 18 years old. Also, you acknowledge that you agree to participate in the study and have the right not to answer any or all the questions in the survey. Finally, you understand your participation is entirely voluntary, and you may quit the study at any time without penalty.

Mark only one oval.

I agree

I disagree

Informed Consent to Participate in a Focus Group

Title of Study: TEACHER ATTRITION AND RETENTION IN CENTRALPENNSYLVANIA: WHAT CAN SCHOOL DISTRICTS AND PRINCIPALS DO TOPROMOTE TEACHER RETENTION?
KEY INFORMATION
You are being asked by Shane Cowher to participate in a research study. Participation in the study is voluntary, and you may stop anytime.
The purpose of the study is to gain a better understanding of why teachers want to leave their current school or traditional public schools entirely. The researcher is seeking to understand what districts can do, as whole, to promote teacher retention, and the researcher is seeking to understand what principals can do to promote teacher retention. In this focus group, you will be asked to answer questions about your attitudes about teacher attrition and retention. You will be asked to answer questions regarding your attitudes regarding job qualities that promote teacher retention in traditional public schools. You will be asked to answer questions about your perspectives on principal support to promote teacher retention.
Participation in the focus group will take approximately 60 minutes.
The potential risks during the study are relatively low but could include breach of confidentiality or nervousness/ anxiety answering questions about your place of employment or seeking alternate employment. Remember, you may stop at anytime. To make participants feel more comfortable, the researcher will use an honest broker to facilitate the focus group. This person will ask all of the questions and will record the entire session. This recording will then be shared with the researcher. In addition, if you feel the need to talk with someone, you may contact the PennWest Edinboro counseling center at 814-732-2252, or for emergencies, call814-732-2911.
There are no direct benefits to participants from the research. It will help researchers better understand the problem of teacher attrition in central Pennsylvania public schools.
SECURITY OF DATA
The information shared in the focus group will be kept confidential, and participants will not be named in the final report.Remember, taking part in this study is voluntary. If you feel uncomfortable or no longer want to participate, you may stop at any time. There are no consequences if you decide to stop participating in this study.
There is no identifiable information collected from you during this study; all other information from this study will be confidential within local, state, and federal laws. The PennWest University Institutional Review Board (IRB) may review the research records. The study results may be shared in aggregate form at a meeting or journal, but there is no identifiable information to be revealed. The records from this study will be maintained for a minimum of three (3) years after the study is complete.
Your information collected in this research *will not* be used or distributed for future research, even if all your identifiers are removed.
If you have questions about the research or a research-related injury, you can contact Dr. Mary Wolf at wolf@pennwest.edu. If you have a question about your rights as a research participant that you need to discuss with someone, you can contact the PennWest University Institutional Review Board at InstReviewBoard@pennwest.edu.

If you would like a copy of this informed consent, please print this screen or contact Shane Cowher at cow02722@pennwest.edu.

By clicking on the "I agree" box and continuing with the survey, you have acknowledged that you have read the informed consent and are at least 18 years old. Also, you acknowledge that you agree to participate in the study and have the right not to answer any or all the questions in the survey. Finally, you understand your participation is entirely voluntary, and you may quit the study at any time without penalty.

Mark only one oval.

I agree

I disagree

Informed Consent to Participate in an Interview

INFORMED CONSENT
**Title of Study: TEACHER ATTRITION AND RETENTION IN
CENTRALPENNSYLVANIA: WHAT CAN SCHOOL DISTRICTS AND
PRINCIPALS DO TOPROMOTE TEACHER RETENTION?**
KEY INFORMATION
You are being asked by Shane Cowher to participate in a research study. Participation in the study is voluntary, and you may stop anytime.
The purpose of this interview is to gain a better understanding of why teachers want to leave their current school or traditional public schools entirely. The researcher is seeking to understand what districts can do, as whole, to promote teacher retention, and the researcher is seeking to understand what principals can do to promote teacher retention. In this interview, you will be asked to answer questions about your attitudes about teacher attrition and retention. You will be asked to answer questions regarding your attitudes regarding job qualities that promote teacher retention in traditional public schools. You will be asked to answer questions about your perspectives on leadership styles that promote teacher retention.
This interview will take approximately 30 minutes.
The potential risks during the study are relatively low but could include breach of confidentiality or nervousness/ anxiety answering questions about your former place of employment or seeking alternate employment. Remember, you may stop the interview at any time. In addition, if you feel the need to talk with someone, you may contact the PennWest Edinboro counseling center at 814-732-2252, or for emergencies, call 814-732-2911.
There are no direct benefits for the participants. It will help researchers better understand the problem of teacher attrition in central Pennsylvania public schools.
SECURITY OF DATA
Remember, taking part in this interview is voluntary. If, while participating in the interview, you feel uncomfortable or no longer want to participate, you may stop at any time. There are no consequences if you decide to stop participating in this study.
Names will not be shared in this study; all other information from this study will be confidential within local, state, and federal laws. The PennWest University Institutional Review Board (IRB) may review the research records. The study results may be shared in aggregate form at a meeting or journal, but there is no identifiable information to be revealed. The records from this study will be maintained for a minimum of three (3) years after the study is complete.
Your information collected in this research *will not* be used or distributed for future research, even if all your identifiers are removed.
If you have questions about the research or a research-related injury, you can contact Dr. Mary Wolf at wolf@pennwest.edu. If you have a question about your rights as a research participant that you need to discuss with someone, you can contact the PennWest University Institutional Review Board at InstReviewBoard@pennwest.edu.
If you would like a copy of this informed consent, please print this screen or contact Shane Cowher at cow02722@pennwest.edu.

By clicking on the "I agree" box and continuing with the survey, you have acknowledged that you have read the informed consent and are at least 18 years old. Also, you acknowledge that you agree to participate in the study and have the right not to answer any or all the questions in the survey. Finally, you understand your participation is entirely voluntary, and you may quit the study at any time without penalty.
Mark only one oval.
I agree
I disagree

APPENDIX C

Survey

Demographic Information

Please answer to the best of your ability.
2.Name of School District

3.Gender
Mark only one oval.
Female
Male

4.Years of Experience
Mark only one oval.
0-5
6-15
16 or more

5. What grade level band do you teach?
Mark only one oval.
PreK-4
5-8
9-12

6.In how many different school districts have you worked?
Mark only one oval.
1
2
3
More than 3

Reasons for Attrition (R1) For the sake of this research, "attrition" refers to teachers leaving their current public teaching position for a teaching position outside of their district or the teaching profession altogether.
Please answer the following questions to the best of your ability.

7. I have worked closely with someone who has left my current district over the past three years.
Mark only one oval.
Yes
No

8.I have considered looking for a job outside of my current district over the past three years.

Mark only one oval.
Yes
No

9.I have actively sought employment outside my current district or left a traditional public teaching role over the past three years.
Mark only one oval.
Yes
No
10.

If you answered "Yes," to either of the previous two questions, what was your primary reason?
Mark only one oval.
I answered "No."
More money
Change of location
Dissatisfaction with the school district
Dissatisfaction with building leadership
Dissatisfaction with teaching altogether

Other:
11.If you have thought about or actively sought employment outside of your current district, or you recently left a position in a public school, please explain why you left in more detail.

12.I can see myself retiring in my current district.
Mark only one oval.
Yes
No
Maybe

13.Please explain your response to the previous question in more detail.

Promoting Teacher Retention For the sake of this research, "retention" refers to teachers who remain in their current school district, even if they change teaching assignments within the district itself.
Please answer the following questions to the best of your ability.

14.What three actions do you believe your current district can take to improve teacher retention? (choose three) (R2)

Check all that apply.
Increase salary

Decrease requirements and paperwork

Provide more time for planning and collaboration
Improve school safety

Improve fringe benefits like insurance, time off, and tuition reimbursement

Improve the building and grounds

Provide more and better resources for students

Offer performance incentives and bonuses

Adjust the school calendar or schedules

Improve staff onboarding and induction

Improve professional development opportunities

15.What is the single most important action your current school district can take to promote teacher retention?

16.Please explain in more detail what you believe to be the most important action your current district can take to improve teacher retention. (R2)

17. What three supports can principals utilize at the building level to promote teacher retention? (choose three) (R3)

Check all that apply.
Communicate more frequently/ effectively

Be more visible

Provide more time for planning and collaboration

Support teachers through student discipline

Evaluate staff in a different way
Provide more instructional leadership

Address staff issues more frequently/ fairly

Allow more teacher freedom

Adjust the schedule

Other:

18. What is the single most important action/support your principal can use to promote teacher retention in your school?

19. Please explain in more detail what you believe to be the number one action/support a principal can use to promote teacher retention. (R3)

APPENDIX D

Focus Group Questions

1. What do you like about your current teaching role? (R2-3)

2. What do you dislike about your current teaching role? (R2-3)

3. Overall, why do you believe teachers are leaving the profession? (R1)

4. What attrition factors are beyond the control of the school district? (R2)

5. What attrition factors are within the control of the school district and how can these be addressed? (R2)

6. What incentives can be provided by the district to promote teacher retention (e.g. increase salary, provide more benefits, change the calendar, allow dress down, increased mentoring)? (R2)

7. What attrition factors are within the control of the principal and how can these be addressed? (R3)

8. What can principals do to promote teacher retention (e.g. communicate better, increase visibility, build rapport with staff)? (R3)

9. What can principals do to improve staff morale and/or job satisfaction? (R3)

10. How can principals improve their approach to handling difficult situations with faculty (e.g. parent complaints, conflict among staff, disagreements about decisions)? (R3)

*These are the questions that will be used for focus groups, in addition to any other additional questions that may arise as a result of these conversations.

<u>Definitions:</u>

Teacher Attrition: For the sake of this research, "attrition" refers to teachers leaving their current public teaching position for a teaching position outside of their district or the teaching profession altogether.

Teacher Retention: For the sake of this research, "retention" refers to teachers who remain in their current school district, even if they change teaching assignments within the district itself.

APPENDIX E

Interview Questions

1. Why did you leave your teaching role? (R1)

2. Was there anything that could have been done to retain you as a district employee? If so, what would that have been? (R2-3)

3. When you left your teaching position, were you frustrated with the district and for what reason? (R1)

4. What did you like about your teaching role? Why? (R2-3)

5. When you left your teaching role, were you frustrated with traditional, brick-and-mortar public education? (R1)

6. What can districts do, as a whole, to promote teacher retention (e.g. increase salary, provide more benefits, change the calendar, allow dress down, increased mentoring)? (R2)

7. What can principals do to promote teacher retention (e.g. communicate better, allow more freedom, build rapport with staff)? (R3)

8. What can principals do to improve staff morale and/or job satisfaction? (R3)

9. How can principals improve their approach to handling difficult situations with faculty? (e.g. parent complaints, conflict among staff, disagreements about decisions) (R3)

10. Is there anything that you like about your new position that could be implemented within TASD to improve faculty retention? (R2-3)

*These are the questions that will be used for interviews with former staff members, in addition to any other additional questions that may arise as a result of these conversations.

Definitions:

Teacher Attrition: For the sake of this research, "attrition" refers to teachers leaving their current public teaching position for a teaching position outside of their district or the teaching profession altogether.

Teacher Retention: For the sake of this research, "retention" refers to teachers who remain in their current school district, even if they change teaching assignments within the district itself.