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A Phenomenological Study of Contributing Factors and Common Trends Related to Teacher Attrition in Western North Carolina

Preston Clarke
East Tennessee State University

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Dr. William Flora, Chair

Dr. Stephanie Barham

Dr. John K. Boyd

Dr. Pamela Scott

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ABSTRACT

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by

Preston Clarke

A phenomenological approach was used to identify contributing factors and common trends related teacher attrition by conducting interviews with teachers who decided to exit a North Carolina School District located in Western North Carolina. A qualitative approach allowed the researcher to gain valuable insight into the decision-making process of the 15 research participants. Data collection involved conducting one on one telephone interviews with participants by asking a series of open-ended questions that allowed for probing and follow-up questions. Analysis of researcher notes, evaluation of textual data produced by interviews, and observations allowed the qualitative investigator to identify emerging themes and patterns to answer the research questions. Family, spouse, job opportunity, money, and relocation were identified as contributing factors in the decision-making process of research participants to leave the North Carolina School district. Suggestions for future research include researchers working with school districts to develop an exit interview in the form of a quantitative research design to identify emerging themes and patterns related to teacher attrition. This will allow for the quick collection of data, and researchers will be able to conduct statistical analysis in a timely manner.

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DEDICATION

For E.J.C and L.J.C

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.

Philippians 4:4-9

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Chapter 1. Introduction

Teacher attrition has continued to rise during the past couple of decades as more teachers decide to exit the teaching profession (Ingersoll et al., 2014). The steady loss of teachers has created instability within the education occupation (Ingersoll et al., 2014). Previously in the United States the national average of public-school teachers exiting the profession has been approximately 8% (Sutcher et al., 2016). There has been some disparity between states with attrition rates of 5% in the northeast of the United States to 15% in Arizona (Sutcher et al., 2016). According to Garcia and Weiss (2019) numerous teachers in public education are choosing to depart the profession. Research from Garcia and Weiss (2019) suggests that 13.8% of teachers are departing from their current schools or they are exiting the teaching profession altogether. High levels of employee departures can be a sign of deeper issues within an organization (Ingersoll & Perda, 2010). Employee departures can have a negative impact on the companies and organizations in which they choose to depart (Ingersoll & Perda, 2010).

Efforts to decrease the percentage of teachers choosing to exit the teaching profession must include identifying the factors associated with attrition (Sutcher et al., 2016). Past research studies have found that the reasons why teachers exit the teaching profession can be attributed to factors centering on support from leadership, range of pay, family, and the quality of school facilities (Shields et al., 1999). Most teachers that depart the profession, express some type of dissatisfaction as contributing to their decision to leave (Sutcher et al., 2016). The various areas of dissatisfaction include physical conditions such as facilities, administrative practices-lack of support from administration, limited autonomy in the classroom, and teacher input on decision making (Sutcher et al., 2016). Walker (2021) indicates that teachers make about twenty percent

less money than other college educated workers who have about the same years of experience in their respective profession.

Teacher turnover creates staffing issues within the education profession (Henry et al., 2012; Kane et al., 2006). Thousands of teachers exit the profession before retirement age (Sutcher et al., 2016). A major consequence of attrition is that when beginning teachers choose to exit the classroom, they lose the opportunity to gain valuable experience and improve their skills. Multiple research studies have indicated that student test scores increase substantially as teachers gain more experience delivering instruction and managing the classroom (Henry et al., 2012; Kane et al., 2006).

Education has been described as a profession that can be difficult for young professionals, as public-school teachers have been known to exit the classroom in early in their teaching careers (Shen, 1997). Perda (2013) noted that approximately half of beginning teachers opt for another career before gaining multiple years of experience delivering instruction and mastering the content. Attrition of new teachers interrupts continuous school improvement, which impacts student achievement (Croasmun et al., 1997). Student learning can suffer due to teachers transitioning in and out classrooms. Wong (2003) reports that it can take several years for a teacher to gain the essential knowledge and the appropriate skills to directly influence positive learning growth among their students.

The constant transition of teachers entering and departing the teaching profession can have a negative impact on stakeholders within a school community (Loeb et al., 2013). In instances where teacher hires result in equally competent staff, the effect of teacher turnover may be associated with lower proficiency among students (Loeb et al., 2013). The compositional impact of teachers leaving the classroom on student learning is thought of as positive when the

incoming teacher is viewed as better than the teacher they are replacing (Loeb et al., 2013). However, if teachers exiting the profession are viewed as better than their replacements than the compositional effect of teacher turnover on student learning is considered to be negative (Loeb et al., 2013).

Nieto (2003a) reversed the conversation regarding teacher attrition by changing the question from "Why do teachers leave?" to "Why do teachers stay?" Nieto (2003a) identified characteristics that *keep teachers going*. Nieto (2003a) suggested that affection, being hopeful, scholarly work, and believing in their ability to influence the future of students are all reasons that teachers choose to continue in the profession. When investigating variables that have an impact on teachers' willingness to stay in the classroom, similar results were discovered by Johnson, Berg, and Donaldson (2005) and Waddell (2007).

In their evaluation of several research studies conducted within the last 15 years that investigate how long a teacher has been teaching and their impact on student learning, Kini and Podolsky (2016) found that:

> 1. Teaching experience is positively associated with student achievement gains throughout a teacher's career. Gains in teacher effectiveness associated with experience are most steep in teachers' initial years but continue to be significant as teachers reach the second, and often third, decades of their careers.
>
> 2. As teachers gain experience, their students not only learn more, as measured by standardized tests, they are also more likely to do better on other measures of success, such as school attendance.

3. Teacher effectiveness increases at a greater rate when they teach in a supportive and

collegial working environment, and when they accumulate experience in the same grade

level, subject, or district.

4. More experienced teachers support greater student learning for their colleagues and the

school as a whole, as well as for their own students. (p.1)

Statement of the Problem

The cycle of hiring and replacing teachers is costly for school districts already in need of

resources for increasing the number of qualified teachers' classrooms ((Barnes et al., 2007)).

Staff continuity plays an important role in the school improvement processes across school

systems (Borman & Dowling, 2008). Especially when school systems are faced with numerous

teachers leaving the classroom which can impede the school improvement process (Borman &

Dowling, 2008). Many schools that have large enrollments of minority students, have low test

scores, and come from low-income families are challenged by high rates of teacher-attrition

(Borman & Dowling, 2008).

Research indicates that teachers who are new to the classroom are more of a risk to leave

public education (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015: Ingersoll, 2003). Research has

revealed that between 19% and 30% of teachers who have been the classroom less than five

years exit the field of education each year (Gray & Taie, 2015: Darling-Hammond & Sykes,

2003). Teachers leaving the classroom at high rates has triggered an infusion of new teachers

into the education profession (Sutcher et al., 2016). During the 2011–2012 school year there was

more teachers available than number of vacancies as the supply of teachers exceeded the number

of teachers that were in demand (Garcia & Weiss, 2019). However, the projection of the number

teachers needed grew rapidly in a short amount time going from around a projected shortage of 20,000 teachers in 2012–2013 to a projected shortage of 64, 000 teachers during the 2015-2016 school year. The projected shortage was estimated to grow to over 110,000 in 2017–2018 (Garcia & Weiss, 2019). The inadequate supply of teachers was projected to grow exponentially in just a few years (Garcia & Weiss, 2019). In the 2017-2018 school year, 3.5 million educators were teaching in public schools across the United States (Irwin et al., 2021). Approximately half of those teachers were elementary school teachers, while the other half were secondary school teachers (Irwin et al., 2021)

The number of teaching vacancies in a school district are directly influenced by the quantity of teachers who depart public education each school year (Haggstrom et al., 1988). Retiring teachers account for about 33% of the teachers that decide to exit public education each year (Schools and Staffing Survey TFS 2004, 2008, & 2012). During the 2015-2016 school 66% of teacher vacancies could be attributed to teachers who left the classroom prior to retirement eligibility (Sutcher et al., 2016). The results of the research by Boe et al. (2008) found that policy initiatives and improvements to keep qualified teachers from leaving the classroom have been limited.

The teaching workforce continues to become more and more unstable with each passing school year. Teacher attrition has been disproportionate across the nation between school districts and states (Ingersoll, 2011; Ingersoll & May, 2012). Public schools that have a high percentage of their student enrollment living in poverty, and a diverse student body face more significant challenges due to teacher turnover than other schools (Ingersoll, 2011; Ingersoll & May, 2012).

Retirement is often considered to be the most prominent factor impacting the rate of teacher turnover (Ingersoll, 2003). However, job dissatisfaction and seeking jobs outside of the teaching profession are the main reasons for teachers exiting the classroom (Ingersoll, 2003). Beginning teachers lack experience and are not familiar with instructional programs. When teachers choose to exit the teaching profession it routinely forces school districts to start the process of teacher development over with new hires (Loeb et al., 2014)

Boe et al. (2008) believe that novice teachers should be expected to exit the profession at a higher rate since they are inexperienced and learning the demands of teaching. It has been noted by others that teachers with little experience who are considered to lacking in certain area should leave the profession (e.g., Johnson et al., 2005; NCES, 2005).

In their study Loeb et al. (2013) found that students demonstrate poor academic performance in the subjects of English Language Arts (ELA) and Math when students are exposed to higher percentages of teacher turnover. This finding can also be prevalent in schools that have a higher percentage of minority (Loeb et al., 2013). The consequences and impact of teacher turnover extends beyond the number of quality of teachers each school has (Loeb et al., 2013).

Sutcher et al. (2016) estimate that by 2025 the teaching profession will need 316,000 new teachers each year. Between 2009 and 2014, people entering the teaching profession declined from 691,000 to 451,000 which represented a 35% decrease (Sutcher et al., 2016). This equaled a reduction of 240,000 teachers entering the profession in 2014 than in 2009 (Sutcher et al., 2016). During the early part of the decade during the 1990s the teacher attrition rate in the United States was approximately 14% (Kelly, 2004). During the 2011-2012 school year there were relatively 3, 377, 900 public school teachers (Goldring et al., 2014). 84 percent of those teachers chose to

return to their current school, another 8 percent remained in education but chose not to continue teaching at the same school the following school year (Goldring et al., 2014). The remaining 8 percent of teachers made the decision not to return to any classroom and exit the field of public education (Goldring et al., 2014).

According to data from the Schools and Staffing Surveys (SASS) from 2011/2012 and the Teacher Follow-Up Survey (TFS) from 2012/2013, the attrition rate for public school teachers was approximately 8 percent (Sutcher et al., 2016). In 2011 there were about 3 million public school teachers who were deemed to be full time in their positions (Sutcher et al., 2016). The following school year, over 238,000 of those teachers decided not to continue in the teaching profession (Sutcher et al., 2016). The percentage of teachers leaving the classroom was below 6 percent in 1989, reaching 8.4 percent in 2004, but has stabilized at a yearly attrition rate of about 8 percent since that time (Sutcher et al., 2016). Decreasing rate at which teachers leave the classroom prior to retirement by at least 2% in the 2015-2016 school year would have reduced the demand by 63, 000 teachers, representing a 25% reduction in the demand for teachers (Sutcher et al., 2016).

The general makeup of schools is important regarding teacher attrition, with attrition being higher in suburban schools, urban schools, private schools, and elementary schools (Borman & Dowling, 2008). The teacher attrition rate has a tendency to run higher in schools where teachers indicate that there is not a sufficient amount of collaboration that takes place between teachers (Borman & Dowling, 2008). The teacher workforce has been reduced due to school districts receiving less funding. Budget cuts in education have led to overcrowded classrooms, shorter school day and years, and cuts to critical education programs that serve vulnerable students (Ingersoll et al., 2014). A reduction in the teacher workforce increases the

challenge for the professionals that remain in the profession as the job demand continues to grow.

Significance of the Study

In the 2015-2016 report to the North Caroling General Assembly about the State of the Teaching Profession in North Carolina, teacher attrition is defined as when teachers of an employee unit depart (NCDPI, 2016, p.4). Data on teachers leaving public education can be measured and collected at the state and LEA level (NCDPI, 2016, p.4). Teacher attrition has varying levels of impact on local education agencies due to various factors such as proximity to neighboring states, densely populated areas, and major universities (NCDPI, 2016, p.16). North Carolina Public Schools are comprised of 115 school systems or local employee agencies. 100 of those school systems are county school systems while the other 15 are city school systems. The North Carolina State Board of Education divides all of the local education agencies of North Carolina into eight education districts by geography.

The North Carolina Department of Commerce projects an increase in teachers North Carolina from 2017 to 2026, with an expected growth of 4.6% (Darling-Hammond et al., 2019). The need for teachers including those that will need to be replaced is expected to be 72, 452 by 2026 (Darling-Hammond et al., 2019). The result of the demand for teachers during that period of time in North Carolina is expected to be attributed to teacher attrition (Darling-Hammond et al., 2019). In 2019-2020 the state of North Carolina had an attrition rate of 7.53% which was lower than the 8.1% attrition rate in the state in 2017-2018 (Public Schools of North Carolina, 2020, p. 6).

Rural school districts are challenged with offering pay and providing working conditions that are similar if not better than school districts located in nearby urban areas (Monk, 2007). A failure of rural school districts to compete with the nearby urban school districts can lead to applicant pools with candidates that are not as qualified (Monk, 2007). School districts that are geographically located in isolated rural areas do not face the same challenges of having to complete with other school districts (Monk, 2007). However, being located in an isolated area geographically can present school districts with other issues when attempting to fill teaching vacancies (Monk, 2007).

The ratio of students to teachers who are well qualified has been a consistent issue over the years in the United States (Adamson & Darling Hammond, 2012). Adamson and Darling-Hammond (2012) evaluated the issue of the unequal teacher distribution studying the funding of schools, pay, and the qualifications of teachers in the states of California and New York. California and New York face many of the same challenges with demographics and in education (Adamson & Darling Hammond, 2012). Under the legislation of the No Child Left Behind Act, attempts to provide equality for schools by utilizing incentives for teachers did not deter the issue of the disparity in teacher quality between schools (Adamson & Darling-Hammond, 2012). Adamson & Darling-Hammond (2012) controlled for the differences in cost of living by adjusting wages, they determined that there was a wide disparity within and between states in the areas of school funding and teacher pay. School districts that pay less are challenged by high needs students, poor working conditions, and employ teachers that are not as qualified which leads to a higher turnover rate (Adamson & Darling-Hammond, 2012).

In their analysis Adamson and Darling-Hammond (2012) found that school districts with enrollments containing a high proportion of minority and low-income students employed more

teachers that lacked qualifications and were less experienced than districts serving a smaller percentage of minority students and a lower number of students coming from families that earn a low income. Adamson and Darling-Hammond (2012) also noted that higher teacher salaries signaled a significant less percentage of teachers that were considered inexperienced and unqualified.

High teacher turnover has a direct impact on schools with low student achievement and schools that have a high percentage of students living in poverty (Barnes et al., 2007). Many schools are faced with notable challenges while working to increase student achievement due to constantly having to fill teacher vacancies (Barnes et al., 2007). These school districts invest excessive amounts of human and financial capital into constantly having to hire and replenish departing teachers that are inexperienced (Barnes et al., 2007).

Urban and rural schools that are considered high need are likely to have teachers that are inexperienced and not as prepared due to a high rate of teacher turnover (Barnes et al., 2007). Research about why teachers are exiting the profession prematurely is critical to decreasing the number of teacher departures (Sutcher et al., 2016).

The percentage of teachers departing the field of public education pre-retirement surged 50% in the span of about 16 years between 1989 and 2005 (Sutcher et al., 2016). A larger number of teacher vacancies can currently be attributed to teacher attrition than in the past (Sutcher et al., 2016). Analyzing national data, (Ingersoll & Perda, forthcoming) found that teaching, in fact, has less attrition than other jobs such as those concerning childcare, administrative assistants, and paralegals. The rate of teachers exiting the classroom pre-retirement is similar to the rate of law enforcement officers that exit their jobs pre-retirement

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(Ingersoll et al., 2014). However, the rate is higher than in occupations like nursing and engineering (Ingersoll et al., 2014).

Monk (2007) observations reveal that rurals school do not have enough teachers that are highly qualified. Rural school districts usually lack the ability to pay teachers a competitive salary due to financial constraints (Monk, 2007). By the 2000-2001 school year, attrition among public school teachers was rising but remained lower than the attrition rate in other professions (Boe et al., 2008). For the ability of school districts to retain teachers to strengthen, significant advancements will have to be made in the teaching profession, including how publics schools are being funded (Boe et al., 2008). If teacher attrition continues to rise, the education profession could be faced with a growing teacher shortage and a depleted workforce (Boe et al., 2008). Student learning gains and students achieving grade level proficiency are impacted by the effectiveness and caliber of teaching professionals that are placed in classrooms (Darling-Hammond, 2002).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this research study is to identify and analyze contributing factors and common trends related to teacher attrition in Western North Carolina. The results of this research study can influence how district personnel handle retention practices.

Research Questions

1) What are the perceptions of teachers from a North Carolina School district regarding exiting the school district?

2) What was the decision-making process for teachers who decided to leave a North Carolina District?

3) What factors were associated with the decision-making process for teachers who decided to exit a North Carolina School District?

Definitions of Terms

The following terms used in this research study have been defined for the purpose of clarification and understanding.

1. **Culture**: Characterized as the fundamental standards and beliefs which govern the way things are done within a school (Fullan, 2007). School culture refers to all of the attitudes, expected behaviors, and beliefs that influence how a school run (Fullan, 2007).

2. **Phenomenological research**: a method of research in which the researcher captures the lived experiences of participants through interviews and observations related to a specific phenomenon (Giorgi 2009; Moustakas,1994)

3. **Teacher attrition**: When teachers decide to leave the field of public education (Borman & Dowling, 2008).

4. **Teacher collaboration:** The engagement of two or more educators who share decision making and are motivated by a common goal (Friend & Cook, 1992).

5. **Teacher preparation:** A course of study that is approved and when completed means that the program participant has met all the state's initial criteria to officially obtain teacher licensure to work in a K-12 school setting (Kuenzi, 2018).

6. **Teacher retention:** the retention of teachers within the same school from one school year to the next (Lochmiller et al., 2016)

7. **Teacher turnover:** the transition of teachers entering and exiting schools each school year (Sorenson & Ladd, 2018).

8. **Working Conditions:** Profession growth opportunities, leadership development, support, quality of facilities, and availability of the appropriate resources (Hirsch et al., 2006).

Limitations and Delimitations

This research study has some limitations. I am a native of North Carolina who has worked in public education in western North Carolina for over fifteen years. Over the course of my career in education I have worked in the roles of teacher, Assistant Principal, and Principal. My lived experiences as a professional educator influenced the topic of this research study. Researcher subjectivity and preconceived notions could impact the interpretation of the data collected.

The phenomenological approach in qualitative research is gaining insight into the point of view of research participants' and their perception of their own lived experiences (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) Herbert Blumer (1969) explained:

> To try to catch the interpretative process by remaining aloof as so-called "objective" observer and refusing to take the role of the acting unit is to risk the worst kind of subjectivism – the objective observer is likely to fill in the process of interpretation with his own surmises in place of catching the process as it occurs in the experience of the acting unit which uses it (p. 86)

Qualitative researchers have to neutralize their own perspective and views of how they see the world (Taylor et al., 2016).

The setting of the research study was limited to phone interviews due to proximity, location, availability, and the impact of Covid-19, a global pandemic. The study contained a small sample size of participants limited to one school district. Research participants had to meet

certain criteria to be eligible to be considered for the research study. The generalization of the

research findings to a larger number of teachers that meet the same criteria for this study may be

limited by these factors. I conducted a credible study by maintaining a high level of ethics by

working within the guidelines of the Institutional Review Board (IRB).

Overview of Research Study

       This study is organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 includes the introduction, statement

of the problem, significance of the problem, and research questions. Chapter 2 includes a

literature review that focuses on influential factors and variables related to teacher attrition:

Teacher Salaries, Role of School Leadership, Teacher Working Conditions, Teacher Preparation,

and Cost of Teacher Attrition. Chapter 3 provides the research plan for this study including the

methodology, information on sampling and participants, data collection, and data analysis.

Chapter 4 indicates the findings from this study based on the thematic coding and analysis of

interview data. Chapter 5 draws conclusions about the research study, summarizes the main

findings of the study, and reveals recommendations for further research.

Chapter 2. Literature Review

The retention of teachers has proved to be a complex issue. Minarik et al. (2003) note that teacher retention cannot be analyzed or investigated from an isolated perspective, because of the many factors and variable that extend across the teaching profession. The consequences and repercussions of teachers leaving their profession can have an impact that extends beyond the classroom (Minarik et al., 2003). The challenge of retaining teachers will require a different approach by leaders and systemic changes that are far reaching (Minarik et al., 2003). Senge (1990) states that systems thinking is applicable when there are multiple challenges and concerns that center on a specific topic or phenomenon, and the solutions to these issues depend on the steps taken by different individuals at various levels. It is evident that these are the current circumstances within our schools (Senge, 1990). When leaders within public education are able to analyze and study the issue of teacher retention from a comprehensive standpoint, gaining an understanding of the complex challenges, can there start to be movement towards identifying possible measures to address teachers departing the classroom (Senge, 1990).

About 66% of the teacher vacancies that occur each year can be accredited to the number of public educators departing the field of teaching each year (Sutcher et al., 2016). High teacher attrition among school districts continues to expand the gap between the number of available teaching positions and the number of teachers hired each year (Sutcher et al., 2016).Rising public school student enrollments will continue to expand the need for more teachers, however teacher attrition will still remain the most critical factor in determining how many teachers are needed to fill vacancies (Sutcher et al., 2016). A large majority of the teaching positions available each year are created when teachers who haven't gained enough experience to be eligible for retirement exit the profession (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). Finding ways to

decrease the high turnover among teachers in public education could also help school leaders with addressing teacher supply issues (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017).

Married Caucasian women with at least one child have higher odds of attrition in the teaching profession (Borman & Dowling, 2008). Teachers who don't hold a graduate degree exit public education at a higher rate, as do teachers who hold a license to teach either math or science (Borman & Dowling, 2008).

When teacher vacancies occur, the process of hiring a new teacher immediately begins (Minarik et al., 2003). Even though the vacancy has been filled, educational leaders still have to seek to gain knowledge and understand the reasons behind teachers deciding to depart their school district (Minarik et al., 2003). Minarik et al. (2003) believes that the recruitment process of school districts must be in line with their vision for teacher instruction and student learning. Being aligned and consistent in these areas can help school districts find suitable ble teachers to fill vacancies created by attrition (Minarik et al., 2003). The hiring of quality teaching professionals that have the appropriate credentials is an important factor in schools being able to increase the retention rate of teachers (Minarik et al., 2003).

More professionals have continued to enter the teaching profession since the mid-1980s and the number of beginning teachers transitioning out of the profession has also continued to increase i(Ingersoll et al., 2014). In 1987–88, teachers averaged fifteen years of teaching experience, by the year 2008 that experience level dropped to the typical teacher being in their beginning year of teaching (Ingersoll et al., 2014). A slowing economy in 2007–08 stifled the expanding number of beginning teachers, which increased the average years of experience among teachers to five (Ingersoll et al., 2014).

Between the school years of 2011-2012 and 2012-2013, approximately 59 percent of teachers did not return to the school where they taught the previous school year, 38 percent of public-school teachers left to teach in another school district, and the remaining 3 percent of teachers made the decision to exit public education to go work in a private school (Goldring et al., 2014). During the 2012-2013 school year 80 percent of public-school teachers who had been in the teaching profession for three years or less remained at their school, 13 percent of those teachers decided to continue their teaching career elsewhere, and 7 percent completely left public school teaching (Goldring et al., 2014). The findings from the research conducted by Sutcher et al. (2016) found the top causes for teachers departing the field teaching was childbirth, childcare, pursuing another career, displeasure with accountability measures, issues with leadership, lack of support, leadership approach, culture in their building, and level of teacher participation in decision-making.

Ingersoll (2003) noted that teaching professionals not being satisfied with their jobs or deciding to pursue other job opportunities are the main influential factors on teacher turnover. In their research Darling-Hammond et al. (2016) focused on factors that played a role in the decisions of teachers remain in the classroom. Salary and compensation were common factors that influenced teachers remaining in the occupation of education. More than sixty percent of teachers who exited public schools in 2012 stated a raise in pay would have heavily influenced their choice about their future as a teacher (Podolsky et al., 2016). Podolsky et al. (2016) also noted in their research that although money might be a factor in teachers choosing not to leave the classroom, that teacher pay is still lower than many other professions. Research from the Center for American Progress revealed that in 30 states teaching professionals who lead

households containing at least four people meet criteria that qualifies them for assistance from the government (Podolsky et al., 2016)

Boe et al. (2008) researched if teachers' shortages were caused by the high number of teachers exiting the classroom or due to there being an insufficient supply of teachers to fill vacancies. Boe et al. (2008) also studied what would be effective solutions to teacher shortages, increasing efforts to retain teachers or a focus on expanding the supply certified teachers. Ingersoll (2001) and NCTAF (2003) have identified the high level of departures from teaching educators as the prominent cause for the challenges of teacher shortages. Ingersoll (2001) and NCTAF (2003) also indicate that the level of need for teachers is created by the high percentage of attrition among public school educators. From this perspective there would be enough teachers to fill the available vacancies in the teaching profession, but the steady loss of public-school educators continues to drive the demand for teachers higher. The results of the research conducted by Boe et al. (2008) were not supportive of this perspective. Evidence produced by the research from Boe et al. (2008) suggested that high percentage of departures among public school teachers was not significant and similar other occupations. During the 1990s non-business professions had a higher percentage of employees exiting their positions than teachers leaving public education (Boe et al., 2008). Research from Henke et al. (2001) indicated that the combined attrition for teaching professional working in public and private schools for less than three years was as low as many other professions. According to Henke et al. (2001) this data meant that entering the field of teaching was just as attractive as other professions. Boe et al. (2008) stated that if being a teacher was not as appealing than efforts to keep teachers from leaving the classroom would be more effective. The belief held by Boe et al. (2008) is that the

best course of action to address teacher shortages will be to focus on expanding the number of certified teachers available for hire.

Public schools containing a diverse student population and a high percentage of students coming from low earning families have a higher probability of having qualified teachers among their faculty (Lankford et al., 2002; Socias et al., 2007). Various research studies linked to multiple states reveal that minority students in schools labeled as low-income face a greater chance of being taught by an unqualified teacher than students that attend predominantly white schools (Darling-Hammond, 2010)

Haycock (2000) believes that the problem of unqualified teachers in public schools is more extensive than what has been reported. Even though most of the teachers at a school may have the appropriate credentials does not mean that they could not be an issue in regard to their impact on student learning (Haycock, 2000). Many teachers in public education are in the early stages of their teaching career or have to teach outside of their licensure area where they may be less effective (Haycock, 2000). Some schools have become a targeted placement for teachers who not certified, as unqualified teachers are more prevalent in certain public schools (Haycock, 2000).

(Darling-Hammond, 2010) states that policies aimed at addressing the causes of high turnover should center on the factors of pay, teacher preparation, teacher working conditions, and how teachers are mentored and supported. Teachers who exit low performing schools talk more about a lack of support from administration where working conditions can be more of an emphasis (Darling-Hammond, 2010). Teachers who decide to leave better performing schools seem to place more of an emphasis on salary (Darling-Hammond, 2010).

Teacher Salaries

During the 2017-2018 school year, the average teacher pay was around $58, 000 (Irwin et al., 2021). Teachers who had completed at least one year of teaching averaged a base salary of $42, 800 in the 2017-2018 school year while teachers had taught at least 30 years or more averaged a base salary of $70 500 (Irwin et al., 2021). In 2015, the pay for teachers working in public schools was 17% less in comparison to professionals in other occupations. In 1994 public school teacher wages were just 1.8% lower than that of comparable workers. Over the years, veteran teachers have seen their pay remain close to stagnant due to a lack of increase in compensation (Allegretto & Mishel, 2016). An increase in benefits for teachers may have come at the expense of pay raises (Allegretto & Mishel, 2016). However, when teacher pay and teacher benefits are combined, public school educators still received 11.1% less in compensation than similar professionals working in other occupations during 2015 (Allegretto & Mishel, 2016).

School districts are consistently competing with other professions for skilled college graduates entering the workforce (Darling-Hammond, 2010). Salaries, benefits, and career preparation are important variables in regard to how the teaching profession compares to other occupations (Darling-Hammond, 2010). The ability to recruit, retain, and develop highly effective educators is imperative to the success of a school district. Providing salaries and benefits that are competitive are critical to the recruitment and retentions efforts of certified quality teachers by school districts (Allegretto & Mishel, 2016)

The rate of retention among public school educators can have an impact on teacher pay (Monk, 2007). A high teacher turnover rate in combination with the hiring of teachers who lack experience can lead to lower salaries for teaching professionals (Monk, 2007). As recruiting tool, there are some school districts that compensate newly employed teachers with a signing bonus

(Minarik et al., 2003). Many innovative organizations have developed a plan to attract potential employees (Minarik et al., 2003). These corporations, companies, etc, understand the importance of working to attract new employees while also taking measures to retain their current employees (Minarik et al., 2003).

Policies aimed at attracting teachers to low-performing schools have been more focused on supplementing teacher salaries with bonuses (Darling-Hammond, 2010). (Darling-Hammond, 2010). However, offering teachers support in other ways such as improving the conditions in which they work have been deemed to be more constructive than simply raising teacher pay (Darling-Hammond, 2010).

Teachers do consider salary as an important factor, but they also seek to teach in school that have good instructional leaders, work with colleagues who value the same things as they do, and have similar goals (Darling-Hammond, 2010). Teachers also value good working conditions and resources along with the appropriate instructional materials to be effective in the classroom (Darling-Hammond, 2010). The transformation of schools and the ability to attract qualified teachers to classrooms can depend heavily on those factors for school districts (Darling-Hammond, 2010).

An intervention program called the Benwood initiative was constructed and implemented to help raise the reading proficiency rate of 12% among third graders in Hamilton County School District located in Chattanooga, Tennessee (Silva, 2008, p. 129). In an effort to attract teachers known for achieving high student test schools, the school district with the assistance of the Benwood Foundation and the Public Education Foundation offered as much as $5000 for an incentive to join the low performing schools (Silva, 2008, p. 129). Some teachers did decide to leave their current school to work in one of the low performing schools (Silva, 2008, p. 129). For

most of the teachers who decided to transfer, working for a principal who displayed a vision for the future and being able to collaborate with colleagues was more of attraction (Silva, 2008, p. 129). New Principals were hired, programs focused on teacher leadership were developed, instructional coaches were brought in, and the school district changed their approach to professional development for teachers (Silva, 2008, p. 129). The school district also contributed to teachers obtaining a master's degree in urban education (Silva, 2008, p. 129). By 2005, the reading proficiency among third grades was up to 74% while reading proficiency among fifth graders rose to 80% (Silva, 2008, p. 129). In the nine schools, existing teachers on staff were able to achieve bigger gains in test scores among students than teachers who had received the $5000 bonus (Silva, 2008, p. 129). The initiative put in place by the Hamilton County School District focused on implementing programs to aide teachers, the hiring of more staff to help with curriculum and instruction, and more of a collaborative approach from school leadership (Silva, 2008, p. 129) A report in the Education Sector concluded that the formulation of Benwood initiative was about more than money and paying teachers for the level of student achievement (Silva, 2008, p. 129). The Benwood initiative centered on educators engaging in professional development to elevate the effectiveness of instruction (Silva, 2008, p. 129).

Darling-Hammond (2010) states that even though teacher demand can be fulfilled, teacher pay has continued decreasing since the 1990s compared to salaries in other professions. After accounting for the time off that teachers receive each year in the summer, it is estimated that teachers make 15% to 30% less than professionals in other occupations that are college graduates (Darling-Hammond, 2010). In Tennessee, school districts were mandated by the State Board of Education to install different levels of pay for all public-school teachers (State Plans to Ensure Equitable Access to Excellent Educators, 2015). Teachers could potentially earn

supplemental pay based on the calculated learning growth among their students, working in schools that were challenged to attract qualified teachers, or teach subjects that had significant shortages (State Plans to Ensure Equitable Access to Excellent Educators, 2015).

Beginning teacher pay and teacher salaries in general vary from state from state (Adamson & Darling-Hammond, 2012). Salaries are an influential variable in the hiring process of teachers while also factoring into teacher retention efforts (Adamson & Darling-Hammond, 2012). Data collected by the National Education Association indicates that the beginning pay for public school teachers working in the United States in 2013 averaged around $36, 000 a year (Sutcher et al., 2016). During that same year, the District of Columbia led the nation with the highest beginning pay for new teachers at $51 ,539 (Sutcher et al., 2016). Beginning teacher pay in the state of Montana in 2013 was last in the nation at $27,274 (Sutcher et al., 2016). In their research Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2017) discovered that teaching professionals in school districts with salaries that surpassed $72,000 were not as likely to depart from their positions as teachers in school districts where teacher pay that topped out at $60,000 or less. The neoclassical economic theory is based on the belief that the location of work can have an influence on the rate of pay that an employee is willing to accept (Monk, 2007). An employee may agree to a lower salary if they find the location of their work appealing (Monk, 2007). Teachers that prefer an urban lifestyle might not be to teach in schools that are located in rural areas (Monk, 2007). This can force school districts in rural areas to pay higher salaries to lure qualified teachers (Monk, 2007). Rural school districts who have lower teacher salaries may have a harder time trying to retain qualified teachers (Monk, 2007). In their research, Haun and Martin (2004) discovered that urban schools have a low percentage of teachers with limited

experience leaving their classrooms over the past four years. In contrast rural area schools had twice as many teachers leave during that same time frame (Haun and Martin, 2004).

When legislators develop policies aimed at retaining quality educators, the topic of educators' salary usually is in the discussion (Jacobs, 2007). Some states have developed policies regarding salary increases for teachers in an effort to keep some of their most effective teachers in the classroom (Jacobs, 2007). Many of the solutions to address the retention of teachers involve plans centered on attracting more prospective teaching professionals (Jacbos, 2007). These solutions may include raising teacher pay, improving the environment in which teachers work, and constructing more pathways to becoming a public-school teacher (Jacobs, 2007). Attracting teachers who are more qualified may depend on an increase in compensation for all teachers or the use of incentives attached to bonus pay (Jacobs, 2007). Increasing pay for teachers across the board may not be as cost effective even though this approach does seem to lower teacher retention rates (Jacobs, 2007). All schools do not face the same challenges in the recruitment of new teachers and trying to retain current teachers on their faculty (Jacobs, 2007). Some school districts that are considered as highly disadvantaged contain schools that have a high rate of success with attracting new teachers (Jacobs, 2007). Providing all teachers with a raise in pay could mean that some teaching professionals received more money for accepting a teaching position that they may have accepted even without receiving an increase in salary (Jacob, 2007).

According to Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2017) improving teacher salaries should consist of providing competitive compensation that is consistent across school districts, and similar to other occupations that require about the same amount of preparation in regards to education. This method of approach will allow school districts to be competitive for

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professionals who are qualified and ready to enter teaching (Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond, 2017). In their research, Kelly (2004) discovered that schools offering higher teacher pay are more effective at retaining beginning teachers. This usually takes place in the beginning years of a teachers' career when they more prone to leave the classroom (Kelly, 2004). Higher pay is essential to the school districts to being able retain beginning teachers, but overall, an increase in salaries doesn't decrease the number of teachers choosing to leave the classroom (Kelly, 2004). As teachers gain more experience and make more money, the rate at which they leave the profession increases (Ingersoll et al., 2014).

The Role of School Leadership

A critical variable in teacher attrition and teacher retention is school leadership along with other components of school working conditions (Learning Policy Institute, 2017). The level of support that school administrators provide is vital in the decision making of teachers about whether or not to remain at their school (Learning Policy Institute, 2017). The leadership style of school principals directly impacts the culture and climate of the school, teacher collaboration, and the participation level of teachers in decision-making (Learning Policy Institute, 2017). The quality of school administration can influence the teacher attrition rate in public schools labeled as low performing and have a high population of students living in poverty (Learning Policy Institute, 2017). The ability and skills demonstrated by effective school administrators are crucial to the retention of quality teachers (Learning Policy Institute, 2017). Teachers who consider their school leader to be non-supportive are more than twice as likely to leave their current school, either by opting to work at another school or exit the teaching profession altogether (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017).

Research indicates that teachers consider school administrator support as important as the job demands they face when it comes to their decision about whether or not they should exit the teaching profession (Learning Policy Institute, 2017). In addition to classroom support, principals may also provide emotional and instructional support to teachers (Learning Policy Institute, 2017). School leaders who work to equip teachers with the appropriate resources for curriculum and instruction are linked to schools that retain a high percentage of their teachers (Learning Policy Institute, 2017). Principals at schools with a lower rate of teacher turnover also work to make sure that teachers have the appropriate means and resources to meet the diverse learning needs of all students (Learning Policy Institute, 2017). A poll conducted by the Public Agenda Foundation revealed that an overwhelming majority of public-school educators would choose to work in a school with administration that they considered supportive (Rochkind et al., 2007). The same poll indicated that 20% of the teachers surveyed would select a school where they would receive more money (Rochkind et al., 2007).

Public schools continue to have to deal with the consequences of their not being enough teachers to fill the available vacancies (Burkhauser, 2016). According to multiple research studies the school conditions in which teachers work can influence their decision about remaining in the classroom (Burkhauser, 2016). Research findings suggests that school leaders can have a heavy impact on he quality of working conditions within a school (Burkhauser, 2016). Burkhauser (2016) utilized data gathered from surveys about teacher working conditions. Burkhauser (2016) used a different strategy to study the relationship between various perspectives from teachers about multiple facets of school conditions and the school administrator. Burkhauser (2016) analyzed the predicted level of impact by the school administrator on the strength of the relationship between all of the measures of the working

conditions. Data collected from the research study suggests that school leaders do play a role in the perceptions that teachers have of the working conditions within their school (Burkhauser, 2016). There was a strong correlation between the measures of impact by school leaders regarding the categories of school working conditions (Burkhauser, 2016). This could potentially mean if teachers have a positive perception of their school administrator relating to one area of the work environment, then it is likely that those teachers have a positive perception of that principal in more areas concerning the work environment (Burkhauser, 2016). An explanation of these findings could be that teachers give similar ratings in various areas of the survey about their work environment because either they generally like the conditions in which they work or they simply dislike them (Burkhauser, 2016). If this were true, it will be hard to specifically measure the level of impact that a principal has on teacher perception in different areas of the school work environment (Burkhauser, 2016).

Numerous research studies concerning teachers leaving schools with high poverty suggests that how teachers perceive school leadership influences their decisions about choosing to exit or stay at a school (Minarik et al., 2003). The ability of school principals to help limit teacher turnover within their schools depends heavily on the kind of relationship that they are able to establish with their faculty (Minarik et al., 2003) The methods of leadership implemented by school administrators can be a factor into teachers deciding to remain at that school, leave for another school, or transition to a different career (Learning Policy Institute, 2017). School leaders who utilize a collaborative approach within their schools are not as likely to face high rates of teacher departures each year (Learning Policy Institute, 2017). These school administrators promote collaboration, shared leadership, and act more as facilitators in their role of Principal (Learning Policy Institute, 2017). These Principals show that they value all teachers

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within their schools by their willingness to enact an inclusive decision-making process (Brown & Wynn, 2009).

Minarik et al. (2003) believe many of the problems that surround teachers exiting the classroom can be solved by school administrators due to teachers generally working alone and not in collaboration. School leaders can potentially structure collaborative teams within their schools that allow teachers to learn from each other (Minarik et al., 2003). Programs focused on the transition of teachers into the education profession and mentoring opportunities for current staff members can help lead to a sense of unity among school faculty (Minarik et al., 2003). Allowing some of the experienced teachers to lead by example can have a positive influence on teachers who have little to no experience (Minarik et al., 2003). Creating an environment centered on helping teachers grow in the profession and giving them the freedom to make decisions are some of the behaviors that are associated with effective school administrators (Minarik et al., 2003). Teachers are then empowered to model and spread those save behaviors throughout the teaching profession (Minarik et al., 2003).

Allen (2002) believes that an effective approach by school administrators to support beginning teachers is to be receptive, approachable, and encouraging. Carver (2003) suggests that school leaders should maintain consistent communication with teachers in their school that are new to the profession. Lambert (2002) and Sergiovanni and Starratt (2002) share similar beliefs about school principals working to always display professionalism to help establish a school environment centered on integrity and collaboration.

Grissom (2011) conducted a quantitative research study on data collected from the 2003-04 Schools and Staffing Survey and the 2004-05 Teacher Follow-up Survey. Grissom (2011) worked to eliminate potential bias by controlling variables and using school district fixed effects

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that specifically compared administrators and teachers within the same context. Grissom (2011) research data revealed the effectiveness of a school administrator is usually rated lower by teachers who work in a school that has a large population of students who are considered to be disadvantaged. Data collected by Grissom (2011) also reveals that the higher principal effectiveness is in relation to teachers displaying more satisfaction is the more likely teachers are to remain in that school for past a year. Principals who are rated as effective seem to influence teacher outcomes more in disadvantaged schools (Grissom, 2011). Initiatives, policies, and strategies that are geared towards getting the most effective principals in challenging schools could help decrease the turnover of teachers (Grissom, 2011).

Teacher Working Conditions

Recruiting and retaining quality teachers is not as challenging for schools a safe learning environments and teachers receive equitable pay (National Center For Education Statistics, 1996). Students are also impacted by teacher working conditions because it impacts how much time teachers can devote to each student (National Center For Education Statistics, 1996). The number of students in each class and students who misbehave can be a disruption to instruction and the learning process (National Center For Education Statistics, 1996). Approximately half of the teachers who decided to leave the classroom during the 2012-2013 school year revealed that their present employer was better at managing workload (Goldring et al., 2014). Over half of the teachers that left the classroom during that time also stated that their overall working conditions were better in their current places of employment than they in teaching (Goldring et al., 2014). Researchers have discovered that teacher working conditions such as culture, professional relationships with colleagues, and time allotted for lesson planning and professional growth

activities are some of the factors that are linked to teacher attrition (Simon & Johnson, 2015). A majority of teachers who make the decision to exit the teaching profession note at least one area of dissatisfaction as having an impact or being very influential in their choice to leave the classroom. (Sutcher et al., 2016). Areas of dissatisfaction for teachers center on classroom capacity, quality of the school building, resources for the classroom, school leadership approach, and testing and accountability measures (Sutcher et al., 2016).

The greater the number of teachers that leave due to challenging working conditions the more difficult it is to fill the growing number of vacancies with teachers who are fully qualified (Henke et al., 2000; Ingersoll, 2001). Less than one-fifth of the total teacher attrition is caused by retiring teachers, specifically in schools that are difficult to staff (Henke et al., 2000; Ingersoll, 2001). Teacher disapproval of working conditions and insufficient teacher preparation are crucial elements that factor into high teacher turnover (Henke et al., 2000; Ingersoll, 2001).

An in-depth research analysis of the departure of teachers in high-poverty schools found that the most critical working conditions linked to teachers leaving are teacher perceptions of leadership within their school, a positive working relationship with colleagues, and the overall school environment (Simon & Johnson, 2015). Similarly, in the analyses conducted by Carver-Thomas (2016) it was discovered that one of the most important factors related to teachers deciding to remain at a school was the level of support from their school administrator. Teachers who viewed their administrator as someone who lacked leadership and the ability to run the school were twice as likely to leave their school as teachers who had a positive view of their school leader (Carver-Thomas, 2016). Poor working conditions in some low socio-economic schools are a reason that teachers are more likely to exit schools with high poverty among their student population (Ingersoll, 2001). Teachers' decision to leave or to stay in the teaching

profession can be attributed to how they feel about the level of support from school administration and the level of input that they have in decision-making (Sutcher et al., 2016). The task of teacher retention can be less challenging when teachers have positive feelings about their school leader and feel like they have influence on key decisions made within the school (Sutcher et al., 2016).

Simon and Johnson (2015) reviewed multiple research studies analyzing teacher turnover by looking at the context of the school and not the demographics of the student enrollment. The six research studies analyzed and reviewed by Simon and Johnson (2015) suggests that teachers don't leave high poverty schools because of the students. However, the reasons that teachers leave is because the environment in those school present significant challenges for student learning (Simon & Johnson, 2015). Teachers consider working conditions that are related to the building level leadership, relationships with colleagues, and various components of the school environment as being the most important (Simon & Johnson, 2015). Simon and Johnson (2015) arrived at the conclusion that the relationship between teachers leaving the classroom, and school enrollment demographics can in large part be explained by the consistent poor working conditions across high need public schools in the United States. The poor working conditions of a school is something that can be addressed and worked on by education leaders at multiple levels, while the student body makeup usually extends far beyond the control of leadership (Simon & Johnson, 2015). School leaders, policy makers, and elected officials have access to data collected from numerous research studies about what factors are considered most important by teachers who are considering whether or not to leave public education (Simon & Johnson, 2015).

Ingersoll and May (2011) found that increased accountability measures like those under the legislation of No Child left Behind that resulted in limiting autonomy among teachers which included restricting the opportunities for teacher to select various texts, specific curriculum, and different forms of assessments are strongly related to minority teacher turnover. Accountability measures seem to specifically influence minority teachers because there are more minority teachers in schools serving a greater number of students with high-needs (Carver-Thomas, 2016). It has been challenging for these schools to achieve certain testing requirements and to meet standards (Carver-Thomas, 2016). Over 75% of all minority teachers work in schools with the most minority students (Carver-Thomas, 2016). Typically, schools of this nature lack the appropriate resources, are challenged by poor teacher working conditions, and have higher numbers of turnover among teachers (Carver-Thomas, 2016). The teacher turnover rate is twice as high in Title I schools than in non-Title I schools (Carver-Thomas, 2016). In Title I schools, teachers tend to be less experienced and do not remain in the teaching profession for as long (Carver-Thomas, 2016). Schools with extreme poverty among their student populations and that also have a high number of minority students have to deal with the impact of teacher shortages more frequently (Sutcher et al., 2016). Over the years substantial evidence indicates that there has been a disparity between how teacher shortages have impacted the most disadvantaged students and other populations of students (Sutcher et al., 2016). Nationwide, in 2013-2014, schools with enrollments of mostly minority students had numerous unlicensed teachers, four more times than that of schools with a low number of minority students (Sutcher et al., 2016). These disparities also evident between schools that are challenged by high poverty among their student population and low poverty schools (Sutcher et al., 2016). Schools that have a lack of resources and exhibit poor working conditions usually have to contend with more teacher

vacancies than schools considered to be more affluent (Sutcher et al., 2016). According to

Adamson and Darling-Hammond (2011), working conditions are a critical factor in the departure

of teachers from schools that a have high percentage of their student enrollment that come from

low-income families.

School that are categorized as urban are located in large cities (Jacob, 2007). It is not

uncommon for urban schools be located in a community with high poverty, but there are many

school located rural areas that are also challenged by poverty (Jacobs, 2007). Research studies

that have focused on comparing the working conditions in various kinds of school settings have

revealed differences mainly in secondary schools in the average number of students in classes

and courses taught (Monk, 2007). The average number of students assigned to each teacher is

lower in elementary and secondary schools that have low student enrollments (Monk, 2007).

According to the NCES, elementary schools with an enrollment of 300 or less students have an

average student to teacher ratio of 13.3, compared with 20.3 for schools with at least 1,500

students (Monk, 2007). The average student to teacher ratio for secondary is usually lower

(Shockley et al., 2006). In some cases, teacher workloads can depend on the enrollment of a

school in regards to the number of students which influences the average student to teacher ratio

(Monk, 2007). Teaching in schools located in rural areas or that have a small student enrollment

can be appealing due to small class sizes (Monk, 2007).

Teacher Preparation

There is mounting research that suggests teachers who are not prepared for the rigors of

teaching have a high probability of departing the education profession (Marinell et al., 2013;

Ingersoll et al., 2014). A research study conducted by the National Center for Education

Statistics about teacher survival rates, revealed that approximately half of teachers who were not certified with an official teaching license ended up leaving education within five years of being hired (Henke et al., 2000) Teachers who had obtained an official teaching license left the classroom at a significantly lesser rate (Henke et al., 2000). In California, the State Standards Board indicated that nearly 40% of teachers who were granted emergency licensure left the profession after just one year in the classroom (Darling-Hammond, 2002). Over half of the teachers receiving an emergency license were never granted certification (Darling-Hammond, 2002).

May and Merrill (2012) report that type of college, type of degree, and quality of preparation have little to no correlation or impact on teachers deciding to leave their profession after only a few years. According to May and Merrill it did not matter what college or university teachers had completed their undergraduate, they were not any more likely to exit or return to the classroom after only one year of teaching. May and Merrill discovered that the rate at which certified teachers in math or science exited the teaching profession was similar to teachers who held degrees outside of those fields. The teacher attrition rate was similar for teachers who gained licensure through a traditional pathway or non-traditional pathway (May & Merrill, 2012). May and Merrill also indicate that beginning teachers who are licensed in math or science are less likely to receive the level of preparation linked to better teacher retention rates. May and Merrill believed that this finding was vital for future policies and strategies. It is imperative that teachers understand the content area that they teach as well as the methods and skills of delivering effective instruction (May & Merrill, 2012). Math and Science teachers seem to not be as prepared when it comes to pedagogy (May & Merrill, 2012). According to May and Merrill

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teachers who have been well versed in the methods and practices of teaching are more likely to remain in the teaching profession for more than one year.

Teachers who have not been well trained are more of a risk to leave the classroom than teachers who have engaged in the proper training, analyzed and observed other teachers, and have had the opportunity to student teach (Ingersoll et al., 2014). A preparation program where future teachers receive constructive feedback, learn about various teaching methods, and learn about effective teaching strategies and instructional techniques is vital to equipping teachers with the right tools to remain in the classroom past the first few years (Ingersoll et al., 2014). Research findings by Ingle (2009) about course preparations in regards to teachers leaving the teaching profession indicate that teachers who take part in more teaching preparation courses are more likely to remain in teaching.

Ingersoll et al. (2014) found that the college of choice, certification, or program pathway had little to no correlation to teachers leaving the profession. However, the quality of preparation for beginning teachers does seem to matter, specifically the knowledge that they gain about the methods and skills of teaching (Ingersoll et al., 2014). Teachers who received more instruction concerning pedagogy were not as likely to leave the classroom after only one year of teaching (Ingersoll et al., 2014). To specifically identify teachers by their college major and methods of preparation for teaching, Ingersoll et al. (2014) utilized a grouping technique based on specific data to separate teachers into five classifications that participated in different programs of preparation in regards to pedagogy. Ingersoll et al. (2014) then proceeded to determine the probability for the preparation that each classification of teachers participated in. The data collected from the research of Ingersoll et al. (2014) revealed a strong correlation between pedagogy and teachers leaving public education. Teachers who received very little to no

preparation about the methods of teaching were more likely to depart after one year in the classroom than those who received extensive training (Ingersoll et al., 2014). The probabilities also indicated that different kinds of pedagogy vary in the strength of their relationship to teacher retention (Ingersoll et al., 2014). The basic level of preparation for pedagogy involved teachers participating in student teaching for half of the school year but not participating in any courses about the methods and practices of teaching (Ingersoll et al., 2014).

It's worth noting that educational policymakers are having a hard time determining how to enhance the talent and skills of the teacher workforce (Atteberry et al., 2013). There is a rare opportunity to identify teachers who are underperforming when they are early in their careers, assess their chances of improving in the future, and make deliberate pre-tenure investments in improvement as well as dismissals to improve teaching quality (Atteberry et al., 2013). Only a small amount of information exists about the dynamics of teacher performance in the first five years (Atteberry et al., 2013). The goal of this study was to evaluate the link between how teachers performed early in their careers to how they performed as they gained experience (Atteberry et al., 2013). Atteberry et al. (2013) found that the initial performance of beginning teachers, on average, is considerably more predictive of future performance than frequently evaluated teacher attributes. Atteberry et al. (2013) used these predictions to investigate how personnel actions were misguided about job performances when such predictions are incorrect, as well as the less well-known costs of failing to differentiate performance when real differences exist (Atteberry et al., 2013). The findings have far-reaching implications for improving the effectiveness of the teaching workforce (Atteberry et al., 2013).

There is a strong relationship between the amount of practice that prospective teachers participate in and the probability of them leaving teaching (Ingersoll et al., 2014). A first-year

teacher who has engaged in at least 12 weeks or more of practice teaching before entering the education profession full time are far less likely to leave than counterparts who had little to no experience teaching (Ingersoll et al., 2014). First-year teachers who participated in more courses centered on pedagogy were not as likely to exit the teaching profession (Ingersoll et al., 2014). For example, teachers who participated in at least three preparation courses about teaching methods were less likely to leave than teachers who did not take those courses (Ingersoll et al., 2014). More new math and science teachers have exited teaching than other new teachers after just one of year of teaching (Ingersoll et al., 2014). That includes 18% of science teachers, 14.5% of mathematics teachers, and 12.3% of teachers associated with other subject areas (Ingersoll et al., 2014).

The analysis of the Schools and Staffing Surveys by Sutcher et al. (2016) found that a significant percentage of educators entering the teaching profession through a non-traditional pathway end up leaving the teaching occupation. Alternatively licensed teachers depart the classroom at a 20% higher rate than teachers who obtain their certification through a traditional pathway (Sutcher et al., 2016).

Jacob (2007) found that teachers who are deemed as highly qualified that work in an urban school tend to switch schools or change careers. Borman and Dowling (2008) found their research to be inconclusive about teacher attrition and if it is actually healthy or not. In theory teachers who have received better preparation and hold a graduate degree are more likely to remain in education (Borman & Dowling, 2008). Teaching professionals who have officially obtained certification also are more like to remain in education as opposed to those who only hold a teaching certificate (Borman & Dowling, 2008).

Students may actually regress in their learning when placed with an under-prepared teacher (Constantine et al., 2009; Darling-Hammond et al., 2009). Public schools that a have high percentage of minority and low-income students among the enrollment, testing scores in core subjects such as math and reading taught by under-prepared teachers decreased from the first semester to the second semester of the school year (Constantine et al., 2009; Darling-Hammond et al., 2009). Research indicates that teachers who receive more comprehensive preparation for teaching translates to better results for students (Constantine et al., 2009; Darling Hammond et al., 2009). Students perform substantially better when they receive instruction from a fully licensed teacher as opposed to a teacher who is still engaged in teacher preparation coursework while actively teaching (Constantine et al., 2009; Darling-Hammond et al., 2009). While the federal government has wanted to expand alternatives routes to being a fully licensed teacher to alleviate teacher recruitment issues in schools that have high needs, alternative programs that do a poor job of preparing future teachers end up being counterproductive (Fowler, 2008). In the span of three years close to half of new teachers exited the teaching profession for the Massachusetts Initiatives for New Teachers (MINT) program (Fowler, 2008). The teacher attrition rate for candidates who took an alternate route to teaching in New York City and Houston reach 50%, as fully prepared beginning teachers found to be more effective (Boyd et al., 2006).

Hammond (2010) states that to establish a consistent supply of teachers that are equipped with the appropriate skills to teach in high-need schools, there needs to be new frameworks focused on improving the ability of teachers while also addressing the challenges of hard to fill vacancies. States like North Carolina have addressed teacher shortages by implementing a program to attract and recruit high school students into the teaching program every year by

subsidizing all of their college education (Darling-Hammond, 2010). The North Carolina

Teaching Fellows program started in 1986 and pays the college tuition for prospective teachers

in exchange for an agreement to become a public-school teacher in the state of North Carolina

for a specified number of years (Darling-Hammond, 2010). The teaching fellows program adds

teacher candidates by increasing the number of males, minorities, and individuals that are

prepared to teach math and science (Darling-Hammond, 2010).

A teacher residency program, that also positions professionals in the middle of their

career who would like to work to urban schools in funded apprenticeships with experienced

professional mentor teachers for a year while they finish courses in curriculum and instruction

while continuing to learn with local affiliated universities, is another excellent strategy (Berry et

al., 2008). These recruits are also mentored for an extra two years after they become qualified

teachers. Candidates agree to invest at least four years in the district's schools in return for the

high level of teacher preparation. (Berry et al., 2008). In Chicago, Boston, and Denver, this

method has led to 85% of these teachers remaining in the classroom after four years. (Berry et

al., 2008).

The advantages of teachers receiving good preparation are strengthened by similarly

effective introduction and mentorship in the early years of teaching, as the residencies

demonstrate (Darling-Hammond, 2010). Numerous research studies have demonstrated that

mentorship programs that are structured the right way increase new teacher retention as well as

attitudes, perceptions of efficacy, and teaching skills. (Darling-Hammond, 2010). The strong

support provided by advisor teachers who have the freedom to focus on this task is one factor for

the programs' effectiveness. (Darling-Hammond, 2010). A full-time advising teacher may mentor

up to 10 teachers within their content area during the year, ensuring that they receive proper

assistance and support. (Darling-Hammond, 2010). Mentors collaborate with each other about

their experience as mentors (Darling-Hammond, 2010). Mentor teachers are selected for their

teaching expertise and knowledge (Darling-Hammond, 2010). Teachers who serve as mentors

are typically matched according to content area and grade level with the teacher they are

mentoring, which add to the value of guidance added (Darling-Hammond, 2010).

Cost of Teacher Attrition

Teachers are an investment and are a crucial resource in the classroom (Carver-Thomas

& Darling-Hammond, 2017). Teacher turnover is a cause of the insufficient supply of teachers

and also costs school districts money to replace teacher departures (Carver-Thomas & Darling-

Hammond, 2017). The cost to replace a teacher could cost as much as $20,000 in some school

districts (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). Student achievement is impacted by the

transition of teachers in and out of the classrooms, schools, and the teaching profession as a

whole (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017).

In their research Barnes et al. (2007) found that numbers are high for teachers who exit

schools that are characterized as at-risk which are defined as low-performing schools that have a

lot of minority students and a high number of students that come from low-income homes.

Teacher retention policies and strategies that are instituted in at-risk schools have the potential to

be really effective (Barnes et al., 2007). Replacement costs associated with teachers changing

schools and leaving the profession are really important to take into consideration when analyzing

solutions to attrition, strategies for teacher retention, and ways to address the insufficient supply

of teachers (Barnes et al., 2007). The actual replacement costs of teacher turnover can be

complex and hard to find (Barnes et al., 2007). School districts will need new more advanced

data systems to gain information about the cost of teacher turnover that is more accurate (Barnes et al., 2007). Evidence produced by Barnes et al. (2007) suggests that teacher turnover costs a lot of money in education systems for school districts and for schools. Barnes, Crowe, and Schaefer (2007) also discovered that a high rate of teachers exited exited low-performing schools with enrollments that contained high concentration of minority students. Schools that are low performing have a difficult time raising proficiency among their students because they are consistently challenged with having to replace teachers (Barnes et al., 2007).

Jacob (2007) states that although low-performing schools have a higher teacher turnover rate, it is not clear if the teachers who leave those schools are better than the teachers who remain. Data from research studies clearly reveal that teachers leave low-performing schools at a higher rate (Jacobs, 2007). Students and schools pay the consequences when beginning teachers exit the profession (Jacobs, 2007). Principals and current teachers have to spend time training teachers that are new to the building in practices and for programs that may be specific to that school (Jacobs, 2007). Depending on how school administrators chose to accommodate new teachers it could potentially cause other teachers in the building to have to carry a heavier work load (Jacobs, 2007). Schools that have a low retention often lose *Institutional memory* when teachers leave because they are forced to start over with a new hire (Jacobs, 2007).

Countries like Finland and Singapore that are considered to have high achieving education systems only have a low percentage of their teachers depart each year (Darling-Hammond & Rothman, 2011). Sutcher et al. (2016) report that across the United States there are many school systems where teachers receive little support after entering the education profession. Reducing the number of teachers that leave the classroom each year in the United States by relatively a small percentage could mean that there will be 60, 000 less teaching

vacancies each year (Sutcher et al., 2016). This reduction will require about 200, 000 teacher

positions needing to be filled each year instead of approximately 260,000 yearly vacancies

(National Center for Education Statistics, 2015). Decreasing the percentage of teachers that exit

the teaching profession each year to about 4% would move the United States closer to the teacher

attrition rate of some high-achieving countries (Sutcher et al., 2016). A decrease of this

magnitude would reduce teacher vacancies by half (Sutcher et al., 2016). This substantial drop in

the demand for teachers would not only alleviate existing teacher shortages, but it would also

create opportunities for more selection, therefore increasing the number skilled teachers across

the nation (Sutcher et al., 2016).

Data collected by The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future

(NCTAF) indicates that turnover among public school teachers in the United States could

potentially be around $7 billion a year (2007). Previously reports by the Alliance for Excellent

Education in 2005 had projected costs to be around $5 billion a year (Carroll, 2007). The more

recent estimate by the National Commission on Teaching and America Future takes into account

the rising number of teaching professionals enter the profession and the rate turnover (Carroll,

2007). NCTAF's estimate focuses on the costs created by teachers when they exit a school or

district during that school year (Carroll, 2007). The estimate also does not take into consideration

teachers who change schools or include any money that may be lost at the state or federal levels

of government (Carroll, 2007). Findings produced by the NCTAF's definitely show that teachers

leaving public education is a real issue (Carroll, 2007). In the fifteen years leading up to 2007,

the rate of teachers exiting the teaching profession had increased by 50% (Carroll, 2007). The

turnover rate among teachers had risen to around 17% during that time (Carroll, 2007). In some

schools, the turnover rate among teachers is greater than the dropout rate for students (Carroll,

2007). Richard Ingersoll a college professor at the University of Pennsylvania believes that states may spend as much as $2.2 billion a year on turnover among teachers (May & Merrill, 2012).

Several research studies have been focused on trying to determine costs created by teacher turnover, but data about costs related to particular school districts is not taken into consideration within those studies (Barnes et al., 2007). Various research studies have utilized formulas constructed by an industry to try and determine what the costs of teacher turnover may be in public education (Barnes et al., 2007). The size of these estimates is staggering (Barnes et al., 2007). However, because accurate information from schools was not used in the data collection process of these studies, the results have not been viewed as significant by policymakers (Barnes et al., 2007). The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (NCTAF) did conduct a pilot study of actual cost data which contained extensive information about teacher recruitment, the hiring process, and costs associated with teacher turnover in five school districts (Barnes et al., 2007).

The five school districts included in the NCTAF's pilot study were Chicago Public Schools (IL), Milwaukee Public Schools (WI), Granville County Schools (NC), Jemez Valley Public Schools, and Santa Rosa Public Schools (NM), which vary greatly in their demographics across communities and locations (Barnes et al., 2007). The NCTAF developed a calculator that school districts can utilize to try and determine the amount of money that it may cost them each year due to teacher turnover (Barnes et al., 2007).

Through their research Barnes et al. (2007) found the costs attributed to teacher turnover to be extensive. The money that school districts had to put into the teacher recruitment, the hiring process, and training for new teachers made up the costs of associated with teacher turnover (Barnes et al., 2007). In Granville County, North Carolina the cost of teacher attrition was

estimated to be around $10, 000 each time a teacher decided to leave the district (Barnes et al., 2007). In small rural school districts the average cost of each teacher leaving could be as low as $4,366, and as much as $17, 872 per teacher in larger school districts such as in cities like Chicago. Teacher turnovers may cost Chicago Public Schools as much as $86 million annually (Barnes et al., 2007).

When school districts lose a teacher it adds to the number teaching position available it also causes districts to incur replacement expenditures (Sutcher et al., 2016). In the past the cost to replace teachers has varied between school districts located in rural and urban areas (Carroll, 2007). Darling-Hammond and Carver-Thomas (2016) believe an all out inclusive approach to decreasing the number of teachers leaving classrooms and will be more cost effective while leading to more proven measures to help train teachers.

Barnes et al. (2007) believe that data including costs related to teacher turnover within a school district can be specifically identified. This detailed information can help school districts determine the teachers that are a risk to leave and from which schools they could be departing (Barnes et al., 2007). School districts across the United States have instituted induction programs to help stifle teacher turnover and retain teachers (Barnes et al., 2007). Programs specifically focused on transitioning new teachers into the profession have been effective in helping reduce the number of teachers leave the classroom while having a positive effect on student learning (Barnes et al., 2007). Decreasing teacher turnover could allow districts to invest more money into induction programs (Barnes et al., 2007). Taking proactive steps to invest in training teachers as they enter the profession could drive down the costs of teacher turnover as less teachers may choose to leave the teaching (Barnes et al., 2007). Chicago Public Schools loses a significant amount of money when teachers choose to leave the district (Barnes et al., 2007). An

organized and detailed teacher induction program combined with an effective teacher retention plan could help save Chicago Publics Schools millions of dollars by decreasing the rate of teacher turnover (Barnes et al., 2007). At-risk schools are limited in the amount resources that they can put towards replacing teachers (Barnes et al., 2007). The rate at which teachers exit at-risk schools is usually high so a high teacher turnover rate can pose even more challenges on how these schools utilize their limited resources (Barnes et al., 2007).

When teachers decide to transition from one school to another it has the same ramifications as when teachers exit the profession (Sutcher et al., 2016). In both scenarios a teaching position is left vacant and there are financial and academic expenses related to their departure (Sutcher et al., 2016). Each year, about 16% of teachers in the United States decide to transfer from their current school to another school (Sutcher et al., 2016). The cost of teacher attrition seems vary between school districts due to size and demographics (Monk, 2007). Schools located in rural areas are usually smaller than urban schools and as a result face higher costs to operate (Monk, 2007). Due to the small class sizes, it may cost more money per students for small schools because regardless of the number of students enrolled some courses are still required (Monk, 2007). The higher costs incurred by rural school districts usually translate to lower salaries for teachers (Monk, 2007). When it is by choice or necessity, operating small schools a challenge when it comes to being cost effective (Monk, 2007).

School personnel can help offset the organizational lost associated with teacher turnover by helping integrate new teachers into the school and providing them with information about current school initiatives and programs (Johnson et al., 2005). The solution to addressing organizational cost may involve schools enrolling new teachers in an elaborate teacher induction program (Boe et al., 2008). While teacher induction programs are currently researched for

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beginning teachers entering the profession, Boe et al. (2008) believe that veteran teachers who are returning to teaching, transitioning to a new school, or teaching a new subject should have the opportunity to participate in a similar program (Boe et al., 2008).

Curriculum and instructional programs that are more consistent between schools and districts could lower the organizational costs of teacher turnover (Boe et al., 2008). This could allow for easier transitions between teaching positions since there would be similar expectations in place for teachers (Boe et al., 2008). A consequence of allowing schools to have autonomy over which programs to use specifically for their school is the challenge of incorporating new teachers into the faculty each year (Boe et al., 2008).

Another strategy that could potentially minimize organizational cost is a focus on increasing the number of teachers available for hire (Boe et al., 2008). The lack of certified teachers in many subjects' areas can be attributed to a high number of teachers leaving the profession and a supply shortage of teachers (Boe et al., 2008). Both of these factors could potentially be responsible for the increases in teacher demand (Boe et al., 2008). According to research, attrition in the teaching profession is not significantly different than attrition in other occupations (Boe et al., 2008). If this is the case than there will need to be a significant increase in the number of public-school teachers available to fill vacancies in education (Boe et al., 2008).

It is challenging for school leaders to make decisions when they don't have relevant data to analyze (Carroll, 2007). In the past, teacher supply has not been an issue for many of the school districts across the United States (Carroll, 2007). School districts must now implement new strategies to help determine the costs of teacher turnover each year including which schools are losing teachers at the highest rates (Carroll, 2007). NCTAF has noted that some leaders in education believe the issue of public educators exiting teaching or choosing to change schools is

beyond their control (Carroll, 2007). If school leaders had the appropriate data to study, then it could potentially lead to better decisions being made about teachers in public education (Carroll, 2007).

During their study of turnover, Barnes et al. (2007) found that some school leaders and citizens of the general public believe that a high percentage of teachers exiting a school is good because it costs districts less money due to less experienced teachers receiving a lower salary. However, Barnes et al. (2007) believe this is misleading and false because schools that have a high turnover rate end up spending lots of money due to consistently having to recruit teachers, go through the hiring process, and provide training for incoming teachers. These schools also are challenged with having to replace quality educators with teachers who lack experience which can drive down proficiency among students (Barnes et al., 2007).

Chapter Summary

In regard to the literature review on factors and trends related to teacher attrition, researchers identified an overwhelming majority of teachers leaving the profession pre-retirement as the driving factor for high teacher attrition. Administrative support and working conditions are factors that researchers identified as being among the most important variables in teacher decisions to leave or stay in the profession. Researchers revealed initiatives that have already been implemented and been successful in combating teacher attrition. Researchers also offered recommendations about policies, teacher preparation programs, and teacher incentives that may be effective in strengthening the teacher workforce. The next chapter details the methods used in the current qualitative study in order to identify the contributing factors and common trends related to teacher attrition in a rural mountain county.

Chapter 3. Methodology

The purpose of this qualitative research study is to analyze contributing factors and common trends related to teacher attrition in Western North Carolina. Teacher attrition is defined as teachers deciding to leave the field of public education (Borman & Dowling, 2008). The developing nature of this research extended opportunities to the researcher to collect and gather detailed data during the process of participants' interviews. Qualitative interviewing can be defined as less rigid, centering on the specific and actual experiences of participants, which go beyond generalization (King & Horrocks, 2010). Rich detailed information is regularly extracted from qualitative methods usually concerning a small number of research participants and cases (Patton, 2002). This expands deeper understanding of the cases and situations (Patton, 2002). Qualitative research is focused on lived experiences, interpretation of research participants' viewpoints and stories, and is rich and holistic (Tracy, 2019).

Research Questions

The central question regarding this research study is what factors are associated with teacher attrition?

1) What are the perceptions of teachers from a North Carolina School district regarding exiting the school district?

2) What was the decision-making process for teachers who decided to leave a North Carolina District?

3) What factors were associated with the decision-making process for teachers who decided to exit a North Carolina School District?

Qualitative Design

A phenomenological approach was used to understand the phenomenon of work-related decisions and to better understand factors associated with teachers who decided to exit a NCSD. A phenomenological research design is a set of qualitative guidelines that a researcher uses to understand a single phenomenon by collecting information about and detailing specific characteristics about the experiences (events, interactions, meanings, etc.) of several participants who have engaged in the phenomenon (Clark & Creswell, 2010). The phenomenon experienced in this research study was that all participants who were interviewed were employed by the same NCSD as educators. Data was collected from participants through interviews regarding their experiences, perceptions, thoughts, and viewpoints related to the factors that led to their decision to exit a NCSD.

Utilizing a phenomenological research design allowed the researcher to analyze the decision-making process of teachers that voluntarily exited a NCSD along with identifying factors that were associated with those decisions. A phenomenological approach allows a researcher to seek understanding through qualitative methods such as observations, interviews, and other methods that leads to more detailed data (Taylor et al., 2015).

Role of the Researcher

Analyzing, the evaluation of behaviors, and conducting interviews with individuals participating in the research study are methods used by qualitative researchers to obtain data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Creswell and Poth (2018) note that qualitative researchers construct patterns, categories, and themes by organizing the data inductively into more conceptual units of information. Researchers work across their collection of data and themes until they are able to establish a comprehensive of set of themes (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The researcher is considered to be the instrument in qualitative research studies (Patton, 2002). The credibility of the research conducted during a qualitative study depends heavily on the skill, knowledge, and accuracy of the researcher (Patton, 2002). The researcher engaged in qualitative research to access the thoughts and feelings of each participant related to their decision to exit a NCSD (Austin & Sutton, 2015). The researcher followed a series of steps during the research study by locating notable statements from interview transcripts, coding, and defining the thoughts and feelings of the participants within context of their experiences (Moustakas, 1994). The researcher acted in the role of gatekeeper during the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The focus and premise of the research study was made known to all participants before they gave consent of their participation. The researcher was able to maintain a good rapport with each research participant during the research study. The researcher engaged in ethical practices while conducting the study.

Ethics

Approval to perform this research study was granted by the Institutional Review Board from East Tennessee State University and from the superintendent of the NCSD, utilized for this study. Participants were provided with a consent letter to indicate their acceptance to participate in the research study. The purpose of the consent letter was to assure participant understanding of the study and that their participation in the research study was voluntary. The researcher solicited the participation of the research participants through email. Attached to the email was an informed consent form detailing the IRB rights of research participants and information relevant to the research study. The identity of the participants was concealed by changing all the names in transcripts and any other documents. Information was carefully analyzed to be certain that it does not reveal the identity of a participant. The researcher was able to create and maintain an

environment during the interviews that was comfortable and accommodating to each participant.

The researcher also maintained the integrity of the research study through confidentiality of

participants in regard to data collection, analysis, and presentation of findings.

Setting

The researcher conducted phone interviews with each participant to gain insight into their

lived experiences and accounts of factors that impacted their decision to exit a NCSD. The

researcher was able to obtain rich data through free-flowing conversations during the phone

interviews (Given, 2008).

Population

The identified population for this research study were former teachers of a NCSD in

Western North Carolina. Population is defined as all individuals that meet certain criteria or a

particular criterion (Lammers & Badia, 2005). The researcher does not intend to generalize the

findings from this study but to understand factors that contribute to teacher attrition in the field

of education.

Sampling Strategy

How researchers determine a sample is crucial to their study (Lammer & Badia, 2005)

This research study consisted of purposeful sampling. The focus of the study was aimed at

gaining information about a phenomenon, not empirical generalizations to a larger population

(Patton, 2002). The reasoning for purposeful sampling is to determine cases that are information

rich and provide insight into the research questions (Emmel, 2013). The population consisted of

former teachers of a NCSD in Western North Carolina. Individuals had to meet certain eligibility

criteria to be considered for the study. Members of the population selected for participation in the

research study were previously employed as teachers by the NCSD in a K-12 setting. All participants exited the school district voluntarily and each participant was in good standing in regard to job performance at the time of their departure.

Sample

Former teachers of a NCSD served as participants in this phenomenological research study. A purposeful sample of 15 participants were used for the study. Participant selection was also based on their decision to leave the school system voluntarily. Teachers who contributed to teacher attrition as a result of actions initiated by the school system did meet not the criteria to be eligible for participation in the study. The research participants were selected from a list provided by the Assistant Superintendent/Human Resource Director from a NCSD, and each teacher in the study were former teachers in the North Carolina School district.

The identity of participants in this study were kept confidential. Participants anonymity will be maintained through the study by referring to each as: participant 1, participant 2, and participant 3, etc. Interviews were conducted in a secure and safe environment where the participant identity remained confidential. The main goal of this study is to gain qualitative data from former teachers of a NCSD about their decisions to leave and the factors that contributed to their decisions during that process.

Data Collection Procedures

Data collection involved telephone interviews with participants. Research participants were asked a series of open-ended questions to allow for rich and deep responses. Interviews lasted approximately 60 minutes. Follow-up questions were utilized to help participants engage in a deep discussion related to the research purpose for this study. All interviews were recorded,

and the researcher made notes related to the interview during that process. All interviews were transcribed and reviewed for accuracy prior to data analysis. All participants were provided with the opportunity to analyze and review their interview transcripts for the purpose of identifying any accounts that they may want omitted from the transcript.

Chapter 4. Data Analysis

The purpose of this research study was to understand the decision-making process of teachers who decided to exit a North Carolina school district and the factors associated with that process for each participant. In responding to structured questions during a phone interview, the research study participants described the essential aspects of their experience working in the school district.

The researcher conducted structured phone interviews with each participant who described the characteristics of the cultures at their respective schools. Participants detailed how their decision-making processes informed their decisions to leave a NCSD, the factors they considered most influential, their satisfaction, their dissatisfaction, the level of support they received, and feedback from leadership. Participants discussed their experiences relative to their tenure while teaching in a NCSD and specifically at their school.

The researcher used a semi structured interview protocol to engage participants in a discussion of their lived experiences as employees of a NCSD and how those experiences influenced their decision to leave the district. Each participant provided a detailed account of their experience during their time of employment. Participants gave their perceptions of the school district regarding teacher support and teacher retention from their perspectives as former teachers. Each participant also described the factors that they prioritized during their decision-making process about their decision to leave the school district. Each teacher had decided to leave the school system on their own terms; none of the teachers were terminated or had exited the school system by way of retirement.

Participant Profiles

   The fifteen participants in this study were former teachers of a NCSD. Each participant analyzed and considered different factors in making their decision to exit the school district. Seven of the fifteen participants did not return to the teaching profession after making the decision to exit the NCSD. The participants teaching experience ranged from 5 years to 31 years and the average tenure in the profession was 13.5 years (See Figure 1). Three of the 15 participants were considered to be beginning teachers with teaching experience from 0-5 years, and six participants taught less than five years in the school district. The average number of years taught in the school district by the research participants was 7.8 years. Years spent teaching in the school district by the research participants ranged from one year to 20 years. Eight of the 15 participants held a master's degree, and three participants had achieved their national board certification. Six of the participants were high school teachers. Two were middle school teachers serving students in 6th grade through 8th grade. Three of the participants were elementary school teachers serving students in grades ranging from kindergarten to 5th grade. Four of the participants worked in teaching positions where they served students at each grade level (K-8). (See Figure 2)
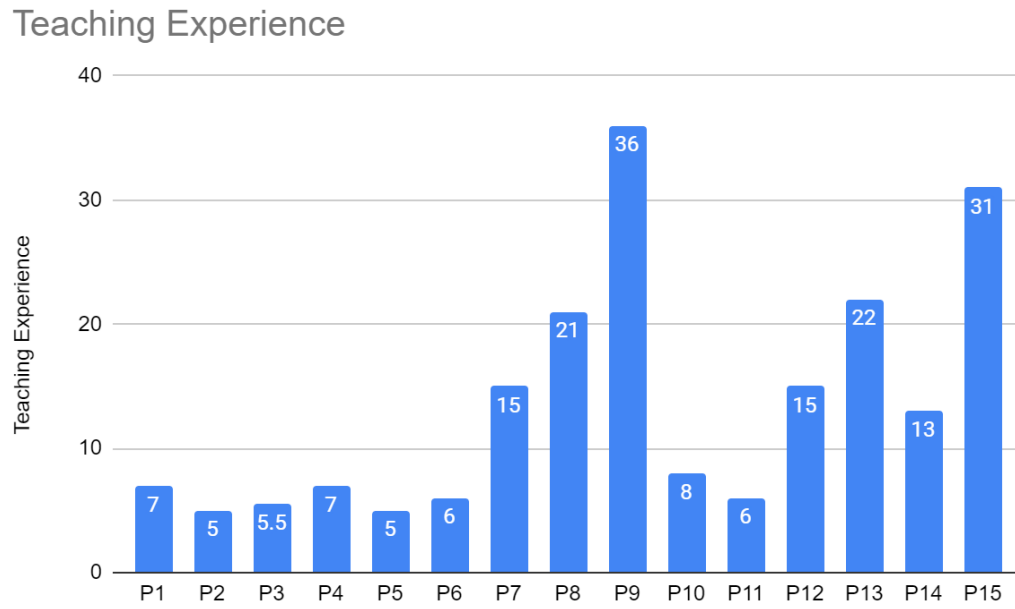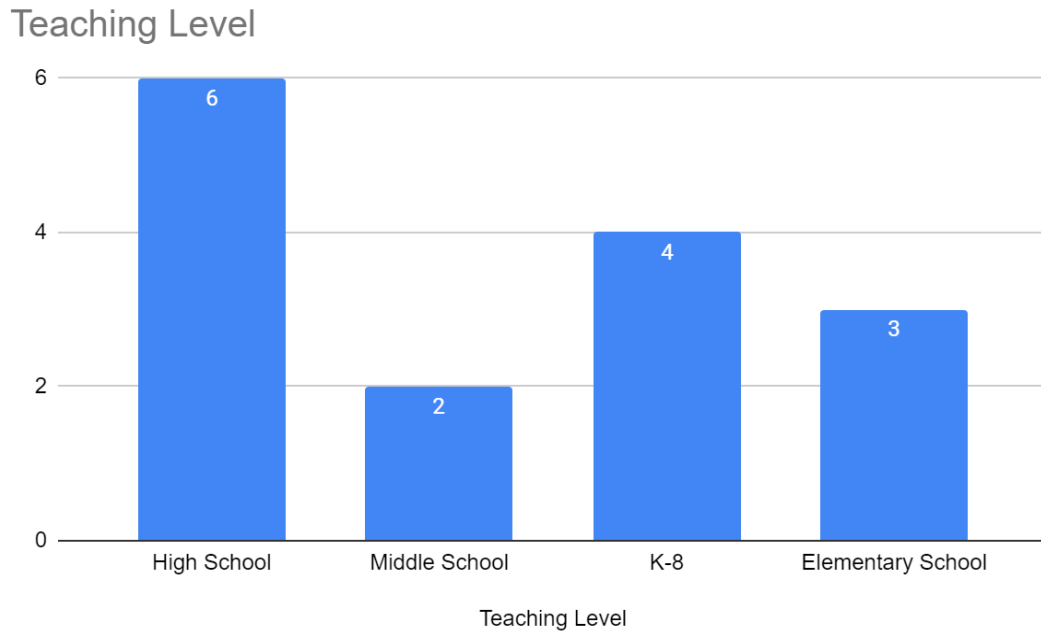
Figure 1

Teaching Experience

Figure 2

Teaching Level

Figure showing a bar chart titled "Teaching Level" with the x-axis labeled "Teaching Level" and bars for: High School (6), Middle School (2), K-8 (4), Elementary School (3).

Interview Results

In the following section of Chapter 4, direct quotes have been extracted from interview transcripts as evidence to support emergent themes from the research study. The purpose of the study was to understand the factors that were associated with the decision-making process for teachers who decided to exit a NCSD. A complete interview consisted of each participant answering all of the interview questions, answering follow up questioning, and engaging in member checking. The following presentation of results will be organized by associated themes and data aligned to the indicated research question. The central question of this research study is what are the factors associated with teacher attrition? The researcher found that research participants in this study factored in family, frustration, spouse, job opportunity, money, burnout, relocation, job demand, job flexibility, leadership, and cultural shift. (See Figure 3).

Figure 3

Confirmability Chart

Research Participants	Familiy	Frustation	Spouse	Job Opportunity	Money	Burnout	Relocation	Job Demand	Job Flexibility	Leadership	Cultural Shift
P1	X				X				X		
P2		X								X	
P3			X				X				
P4	X				X						
P5				X							
P6				X	X						
P7	X	X									
P8			X								
P9			X								
P10				X			X				
P11	X										
P12	X				X		X				
P13		X							X		
P14	X						X				
P15					X		X				X

What are the perceptions from teachers from a North Carolina school district regarding exiting the school district?

Culture. For the purpose of this research study, culture is defined as the fundamental standards and beliefs which govern the way things are done within a school (Fullan, 2007). The researcher finds that multiple participants described the culture within their school as collaborative, family oriented, and supportive. During interviews most participants seemed positive and upbeat when describing the culture within their respective schools. (See Figure 4). Participant 1 described culture in the following way, they felt that people were collaborative. Participant 1 was very positive when talking about the culture within their school:

> I thought it was a great culture. Through six years I went through a couple of different
>
> principals. I thought the culture was good, the teachers were very collaborative, and they
>
> had just instituted the PLT (*professional learning teams)* process. Teachers really got on
>
> that, and with my group, we had three teachers in my department. We got along; I mean
>
> we were super collaborative.

Similar to Participant 1, Participant 3 conveyed: a positive perception of the culture:

> I feel like the culture there was really supportive it was very family and community-
>
> oriented. It was very caring, and I felt like people wanted to improve their teaching, be
>
> better teachers, and be better co-workers. I feel like they did a pretty good job, like
>
> having a growth mindset.

Participant 4 indicated an evolving culture:

> I would say that high school is a very special and unique place. It also had a changing
>
> culture; I saw a lot of change from the seven years that I was teaching. When I started

teaching there it was kind of an honor. I remember talking to several people that I graduated with and they were just shocked that I got a job at a high school that no one could get into. That kind of changed over the course of the seven years to seeing a lot more turnover. All that being said I do feel like it was a strong tight-knit community and culture. We definitely had a culture of community like a special community with just the type students that we had. I felt like it was different than anything I had ever experienced in a school. We had a wide range of students, but I don't know if special is the best way that I can explain it.

Participant 10 noted that they worked alongside collaborative colleagues at their school, but the turnover in administrators during a short amount of time was a challenge for the culture:

Very knowledgeable, very close, and staff was very collaborative. I enjoyed the people I worked with; we were very close. We had a lot of turnover in administration which affected the culture but overall the teachers were very close and very knowledgeable. I really enjoyed it there.

Participant 11 stated the following in regard to the unique culture at their school:

Very close, we had a lot of teachers that had been there for a very long time. It's a very small town, everyone is like family. I love that about it. Sometimes you can have judgment maybe but you didn't have that there. I feel like they were very open and very aware about cultural differences. The staff is very supportive of one another, and the students are supportive of the staff.

The response from Participant 12 about culture is similar to other participants and their perceptions of culture:

We were like at a family there, it was just an amazing place to work. Everybody helped

each other and was supportive of each other. You just felt very supported. You also felt

like you had a say and your voice mattered.

Participant 14 was a full-time teacher who split their time between two schools. Their response
described their perception of the cultures at each school:

Well, I feel like both schools have very different cultures. *School #1,* at the time when I

was there, had very good teacher leadership, was like family, very much a place that you

wanted to be. *School #2* wasn't so much united together. There were, I want to say kind

of two main groups. I always said kind of the old school in the new castle. Nothing's

been changed now. I don't know it was almost like there was two different parts of the

school all teaching under the same roof.

Participant 15 spent almost their entire career at one school in the district, and they reflected on
how the culture evolved after transitioning to a new school building:

Well, I saw it change a little bit when we went to the new school building. We left an

older building and went to another brand-new facility. I think the way the school was

built, it was so spread out. I think we lost a little bit of camaraderie – not within our own

departments – but within the whole school. I think we lost a little bit of that personal

camaraderie that we would normally have with the entire faculty.

Figure 4

Culture
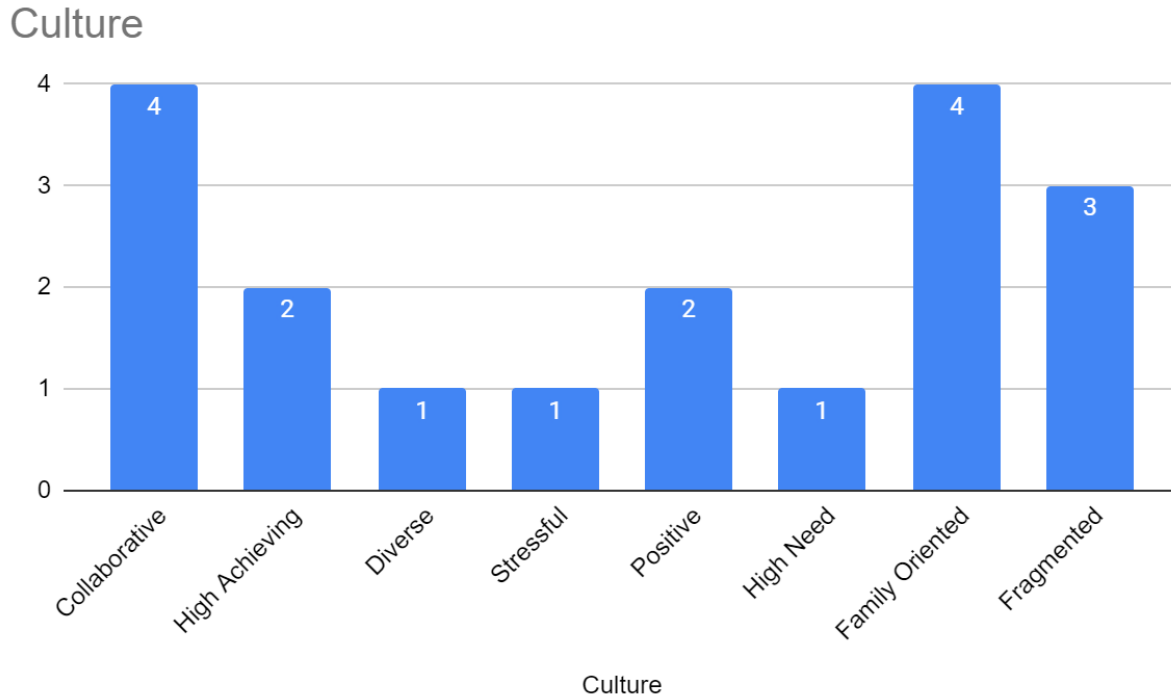
Feedback and Support. During the interview participants were asked about the level of

support that they received from leadership within the school and district. Participants were also

asked if they received sufficient feedback in regard to their performance as a teacher. The

following participants felt supported by leadership but indicated that the feedback that they

received about their performance was insufficient. Participant 2 expressed disappointment with

how they received feedback from the leadership at their school:

> Kind of going back to the leadership thing, it just felt like there is no clear leader and
>
> vision of what exactly they wanted when it came to certain aspects. Honestly, I think
>
> there was there were support. I was kind of given the freedom to try different things.
>
> The support was there I think at least verbally. I kind of had to separate one from the

other. That led to continued not clear understanding what exactly they wanted me to do.

I would say especially from one side of it you know I'd get my yearly evaluation,

conversations just sporadically here and there. They made me feel like they didn't really

have like a clear understanding of what exactly I was doing and felt like I was getting

feedback based on like what other people said to that person rather than direct feedback.

Participant 4 noted how the numerous duties and responsibilities seemed to affect the

administration's ability to provide sufficient feedback and support:

I would say that it was different depending on the administration team as well as the

department that I was in. The level of support within when I was a core subject teacher

was much different than when I was a CTE teacher. Some of that culture may have been

because when I was a core subject teacher, pretty much everyone I was teaching with had

been there twenty years maybe. They had been there a long time and so for the most part,

not everyone, but the majority of them did things a certain way. They just kind of kept to

themselves, they were kind people, but when it came to the job they did it their way. You

were gonna figure out your own way. My coworkers in the business marketing

department were encouraging. It was truly a team effort which was awesome and that

certainly helped carry the load of preparing, making things more effective, you know

working smarter not harder so that was really nice. Then the administration – I saw many

different administrators come and go. I mean for the most part they were all supportive of

us but probably spread too thin. Even the ones that wanted to help and, you know, would

sit down and have a conversation with me about, "hey let's try this," or "how can I help

you" '. . . sometimes it would end there. Not their fault, you think you're having this one-

on-one conversation where they're really going to be like this big backbone for you but

the reality is that they are trying to be a backbone and support for a multitude of teachers.

So, you know, just depended I guess where the school was – on what they really could

do. Great people, but a lot of times spread too thin. I probably felt like I would have

preferred more critique.

I felt like I was a good teacher and I feel like most good teachers want to know, "How

can I be better?" I wasn't the type of teacher that just wanted to coast through, and so if

anything, I would have appreciated more constructive criticism. Yeah, I got some but I

wouldn't say that administration was in my room observing me anymore than they had to

– you know with the required observations. Based on that, I don't know that I could have

gotten much more of those observations. I was told beforehand, so of course I'm gonna

put my best foot forward. It was so much watching and evaluating. If I had more people

dropping in they may see me on a bad day or you know they may see me when things are

scattered and a little bit uglier and maybe could have helped.

In their response Participant 6 talked about the job demand on administration, and their ability to

give teachers the attention they need:

My experience in six years, I had tremendous support. I would say that the number one

biggest source of support was from my direct colleagues, other teachers in our

department. I also felt support from administration, but I would have to say that

administration is often times a stretch in public schools. They don't have the resources

that they need to be able to give every teacher the attention that they might need to give.

Overall, just incredibly supportive environment from our support staff, teachers, and

administration.

I would say that's an area where I felt like if you were performing well, you were kind of

left alone. They didn't bother me, but I didn't necessarily think that I received

constructive feedback in a robust way.

Participant 6 was asked if being left alone was unique to them as an individual or if their

perspective was relative to teachers in general:

Yeah, I that's my general take on it and I think there are a number of factors that play

there. Some of that is the amount that is asked of administrators. The secondary level, so

many teachers are specializing in so many different areas. It's a very daunting task to

provide really valuable feedback in all those different content areas.

Despite the changes in administration, Participant 10 noted the continued support during their

tenure:

We had a lot of administrative change. Great support, a lot of support. My mentor teacher

was right across the hall. I wish I would have gotten more conversation. I wish I would

have got more of, very analytical. I really wish that they would have taken more time in

my post observation conferences to really talk to me about good teaching strategies and

things like that.

Participant 13 described good support in their school from administration but expressed

displeasure about the instrument utilized for observations and feedback. Administrators are

required to use the evaluation instrument by the state of North Carolina Department of

Instruction:

That was pretty good, pretty high-level support. I don't know – we don't need to get the

names or anything like that. The head of our technology was awesome. It had been a little

strange when I first got here but lately I had really good support. The people that they

sent out to the schools – they were great. My principals were really good. When people

come from this office, they would know you by name, so I felt like that was a good level

of support and I think they understood your job.

 You know that's kind of one of my pet peeves is those yearly performance things. I

always felt like they were a waste of time especially for my job. I thought the instrument

seemed very robotic and I always felt guilty for taking the time from the administrator

because it just felt like a waste of time on their part. It's kind of like a waste on my part; I

felt like if I was doing my job, they knew it, I knew it, and then we get to sit there and go

through all the little so on. I understand the reason for them, but I do feel like overall it's

just kind of like busy work. I know that's a lot of work you know. I didn't feel like it was

a good use of my time.

Participant 14 was shared between two schools. The participant felt supported by the

administration at both schools:

I felt very supported at both schools personally. I don't see criticism, but I often ask

things like, "okay what can I do better?" We are all human and we can all do better in

different places, so I often asked for that on evaluations. Sometimes it was difficult to get

that out.

Retention. What suggestions do you have for improving the work environment within

the school district? In reflecting about their tenure in the North Carolina school district,

participants were asked about what suggestions for improvement within the school of their

employment. Six out of the 15 participants suggested that their school continue to build culture.

Participant 2 emphasized strong leadership and working as a team as suggestions for continuing

to build culture at their school:

I think definitely creating a team-like culture is very important. When I was leaving,

they were trying to build that a little bit. It's definitely important and I think this isn't

just in education. I think it's companies, schools, whatever. I think it's important to have

good strong leadership and then that kind of goes all the way at the top from county

office all the way down to the school to each different division and departments. I think

leadership is a big part and then what makes or breaks just in general. How happy you

know teachers are. How good your work environment is and things like that.

Participant 4 talked about improving the morale in the building and how that might lead teachers

to remain in their positions:

What I would say that they could improve on, I think, maybe morale. I think that

Carolina County Schools has a lot of pride in who they are which is a good thing. A lot

of spirit is lacking so we have high pride but not a lot of spirit and I don't know how you

inject spirit into the blood stream of a school. I think that is a culture shift and I think

there are lots of people that are working towards that. I don't know if some of that may be

kind of a newer mentality, but I think if teachers felt like they were a part of something

bigger, a collective feeling, a feeling they're a part of something bigger than they might

be less likely to leave. (See Figure 5). It might just make it harder for them to move on

and that takes time certainly, but I think it's very important.

Increasing mentorship and establishing more of a support system for young teachers were the

focus of Participant 5 suggestions:

That's a good question because I think it's such a great school system to be honest, I

really do. I think just increasing the mentorship with teachers like making sure young

teachers are supported by teachers within the system and making a great program of

mentors. I think that's always important that people know what can happen, this is what

you need to do, this is going to happen, even if you don't think it's gonna happen, this is

how you deal with that. I just think maybe having a little bit more of a support and

follow up with some young teachers with classroom management things like that. I

think they do a good job, they did while I was there but I think that's always something

that you can provide.

Participant 7 noted the importance of a supportive administration and the feeling of not having

added pressure about job performance:

You definitely have to make people feel welcome and like you're not trying to catch

them do the wrong thing. I like very supportive principals who I didn't feel like they

were trying to catch me. I did have situations where I felt like other people were trying

to see if I was doing something wrong and that was the tip of the iceberg. I can't be

stressed about my job, making sure I'm doing the right thing where I know I'm not doing

anything illegal or wrong.

Even though it has been a few years, Participant 8 was very fond of their time in the school

district. The participant noted how leadership should focus on creating a sense of togetherness

among teachers in the building:

It's been five years you know. When I started there, I remember thinking I'm so lucky to

be a part of this department because they were so supportive of each other. It was like a

big family and it's not like that anymore. I think it would be beneficial for the

administration, for the district director to kind of figure out a way to bring them back

together and to function as a group.

The response about suggestions for improvement from Participant 15 was very similar to

Participant 8. Participant 15 also emphasized togetherness. Both participants worked at the

same school in the school district for much of the same time period; Participant 15 noted:

> Well, I don't know how it's been for the last five years, but I think bringing the faculty together more right. The school I'm at right now, we do a lot of collaboration within departments, but we also have get-togethers. A lot of times there's not much camaraderie in a faculty meeting. Getting the faculty together, spending more time together, just being able to see people in different departments and actually knowing who these people are. There were teachers I didn't see for the whole year. It is hard to have a relationship with somebody you never see.

Figure 5

Suggestions
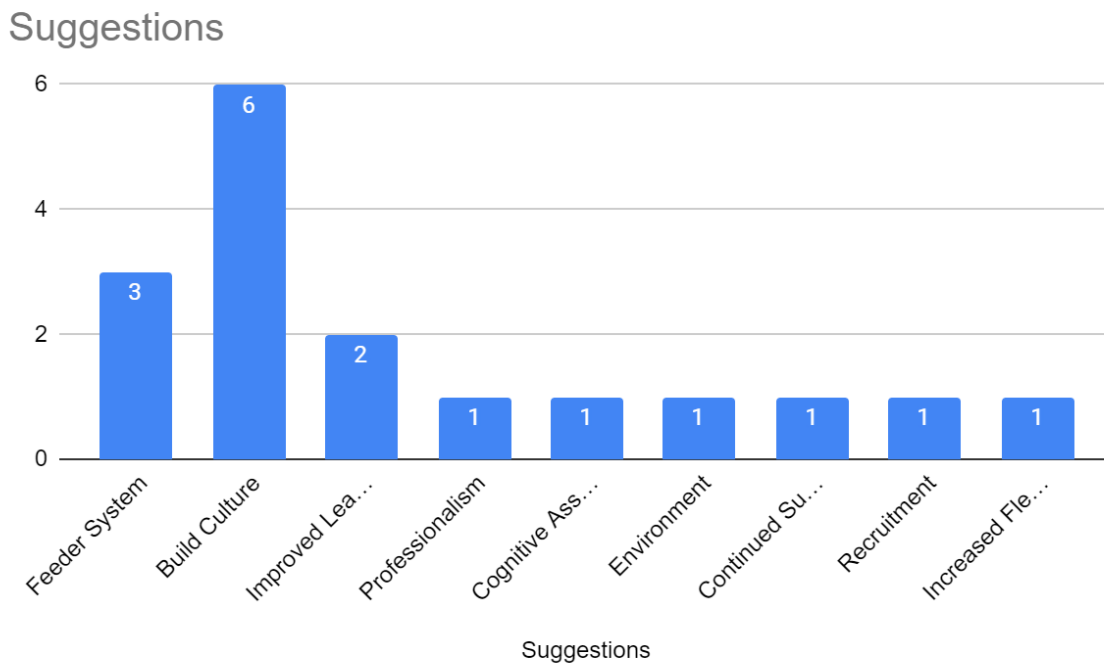
Suggestions

What was the decision-making process for teachers who decided to leave a North Carolina District?

Participants were asked to describe how they arrived at their decision to depart the school district. Family was a critical factor in the decision-making process of Participant 1. The participant seemed at ease with their decision.

> I feel like I have a little bit of a unique situation. My family owns a real estate appraisal company, and I got my license, my appraisal license, the summer before my senior year of high school. So, I've been doing that part time from the time I was in my freshman year of college through when I was teaching. My wife found out she was pregnant. It was just kind of you know something that had always been kind of an option for me. At that time to be able to provide her the option to stay home with the baby and work with my family, my father, and financially provide for my family. I thought it was the best time to move on and do that full time.

Built up frustration factored heavily into the decision by Participant 2 to exit the school district, and ultimately the teaching profession:

> Kind of hearing you know this is what we want to do and then the follow through wasn't necessarily always there. Once that frustration kind of built up, the way that certain events, specific situations, and seeing some things the way they were handled. I think that it was just the frustration was already there. That was just kind of the last straw that broke everything.

Participant 3 was influenced by the career path of their fiancé:

76

My fiancé has a job here that he loves; he's a firefighter and I was never fully committed to being a teacher for my lifetime. He wants to be a lifetime firefighter, a career firefighter, so we chose to live here. I wasn't attached to my job – like I was willing to let my job go as he really wanted to keep his.

Participant 4 described a situation of life changes and finances playing a huge part in their deciding not to return to teaching:

Yeah, a huge part of that was finances because I really didn't get into teaching for the money. Your life situations change over time. I knew teachers didn't get a lot of money in our state and that was fine. Life changes and their demands that come with having a family and the finances just didn't make sense for us to pay for childcare and insurance and all of that. Lately there are very few options for childcare, especially child care that I would feel comfortable leaving my daughter with or leaving her at all day long. Then of course just like the cost of living with the housing market up here. It's expensive to live up here so yeah, I look sometimes at what it would cost to live in other places in North Carolina and it makes me want to but it's hard. If you're looking to start a family and you have to take into consideration, how much daycare is. That plays into the financial picture, I've been down that road before.

Participant 5 was met with a job opportunity, an increase in income, and the chance to pursue a master's level degree:

So to be quite honest I felt like it was a great opportunity for me to go get my masters for free and the university would pay for that. Then I also felt like it was a great opportunity to grow as a coach. It was an opportunity for travel and would increase my overall income.

Similar to Participant 5, Participant 6 wanted to advance their career which came with an increase of income:

> I think you know compensation was a big piece of the puzzle. Opportunities for advancement are another factor that I had considered. I sort of felt like I knew what my opportunities for advancement were as a public-school teacher. I could see a few things on the horizon, and I knew national boards was an option. I knew possibly going back to school and moving into sort of an administrative role was an option. When I saw another job offer with more compensation, opportunities for advancement at work were going to require me to spend more money on school. It's sort of what I consider more of like a wide-open range of the best opportunities. I think that's what really made me pull the trigger.

A focus on family led Participant 7 away from the teaching profession:

> In school we had a really good team of people that really came together. I felt like the purpose was to help him and as he's gotten older, I feel like more of the purpose was to make it easier for people who are working with him. You weren't always wanting to do what was best for kids. They wanted to make it what could be the easiest way to meet the needs of students. Being a teacher kind of gave me insight. Where your typical parent might not have that insight. I can give you an example right now we're gonna have an IEP meeting on Thursday and I want him to be able to have paper and pencil because it's really hard for him to do things on the computer. The only reason I know that's an option is because I know what to look at the manual. I can see that it is written in the IEP and if the IEP team says it's okay then you can do that, and other parents have no idea that's an option.

Participant 8 loved teaching in the school district and their decision to exit the school district was

forced by the career advancement of their spouse which required relocation:

> Regardless of the principal we had because we went through some. The one thing that I
>
> will say is every principal, regardless of how good or bad I thought they might be, always
>
> supported me. The program is really big, and I don't remember any principal ever not
>
> trying to support that and help along the way. I think it was a very blessed culture. I don't
>
> think I realize how blessed I was.

Lack of employment and income weighed heavily in the decision-making process of Participant

9:

> We're a two-income family and we were not able to continue our livelihood without him
>
> being employed and with his line of work he needs to be in an easy commute to a metro
>
> area. It wasn't he couldn't for ten months, he couldn't find employment otherwise we
>
> would still be there. I felt like the county with having the university there, if you were
>
> not employed at the university or you were not employed with the school system, if you
>
> were in a technical professional field and you were not part of a family that had a
>
> business. It was very difficult to get your foot in the door. Rural setting you got a lot of
>
> family businesses around. Coming from the outside is kind of hard to make your way.
>
> We moved up there for him to go to work with somebody that we already knew. Very
>
> small business and he just couldn't make ends meet and keep my husband on payroll.

Participant 10 was seeking to advance their career within public education although career

advancement opportunities beyond the classroom are limited:

> Okay I definitely got to do something else. Right now, the fact that I've been doing the
>
> same thing in the same position I'd even discuss like with your grade level, things like

that. I was just kind of ready for a change, ready for a new challenge, to do something

different. I enjoyed being around the students making a difference in that aspect and that's

when I kind of landed on a direction, the leadership opportunities. I was just ready for a

new challenge. It kind of a built up over the years. Thank God they have had some other

options, but I chose to progress in my career, go back school.

The upbringing of Participant 11 was a big factor in their decision-making process as they

wanted to be able to live in the same manner as their parents did:

I love that my mom was able to be there when I was growing up. I knew that I wanted to

if financially possible. I wanted to do that for our kids whenever we would have that;

there's nothing about the school that made me leave. I was just wanting to be home with

my baby and be there for all of the experiences that she would have.

Participant 12 was very happy being a teacher in the school district, but life circumstances forced

them to make a critical decision to leave. Participant 12 continued as a teacher after relocating:

I felt like I wasn't being fair to anybody. I was getting there right when school started and

then I was leaving as soon as the kids left. I felt like I wasn't being fair to my students or

my own children. It would be like five thirty/six o'clock when I got home. I was lucky

that semester that I had a student teacher. She really pulled my weight but, ultimately, I

knew the best decision was to get a job that was closer to home.

Like many of the others, Participant 13 was happy with their time in the school district:

Overall, I was really happy with the school district but there were some issues last year

where I was having some health issues. I was being shared between two schools which is

difficult job which I know is more common up here. If I had to narrow it down, I'd say it

was maybe those two factors like the sharing between school and job demands. I think

there was like one point in the winter, I'm like this is ridiculous. With all the shared stuff,

especially yearbooks, and if I recall I know there was some issue like with snow day

passes. I asked if I could work at home on the yearbooks. I just remember that being like,

oh my gosh, they were taken leave days because there's like some rule about that. I was

thinking to myself this seems ridiculous, I'm working like way beyond what I should

have to and so you know that definitely played a role. I wouldn't say they were like a fifty

percent factor in deciding but it help make this plus I had other options. I had the luxury

of being able to make that decision.

Participant 14, as was Participant 13 was happy with their time in the school district. Participant

14 really emphasized that their decision to exit the school district wasn't about anything in

relation to school:

Really, it was personal because the year I was gone all the time and it was so hard.

Everything was on hold for that so then when he had the opportunity pop up in Asheville.

I kind of always like that so it's kind of a grown-up Boone. I was more than willing to try

something new. There wasn't anything, it did not have anything to do with anything.

Multiple factors seemed to play a part in the decision-making process of Participant 15 to exit the

school district. Participant 15 displayed mixed feelings during the interview about their decision,

but also noted how well things have worked out since relocating to another school district:

Well, one of the hard things about leaving was I've been there for so long. I felt like I

had, you know, earned a spot on the faculty that might be considered respected or

whatever. At the same time – one of the factors, it is so expensive to live here with it

being a tourist town and all that. I really feel like the salaries should be higher because of

the cost of living. One reason is the building like I said, it was kind of leaving the old

school in town. It kind of hurt a little bit since we're so spread out. Even though I've been

there twenty years a little bit of not as much respect for the veterans of the school. When

we went to the new school it seems that we lost a little bit of that. Maybe because we

were in the new facility, it didn't feel like a hometown school anymore.

Research Question 3

What factors were associated with the decision-making process for teachers who decided

to exit a North Carolina School District?

The factor of family was the emergent theme for over half of the research participants

during their decision-making process to exit a North Carolina school district. Even though other

factors were weighed over the course of the process, the primary reason for leaving the school

district reverted back to family for a majority of the research participants. Pregnancies, job

opportunities, life circumstances regarding a spouse, and medical conditions were all factors that

affected the decision-making process of research participants relative to family. (See Figure 6).

It was evident that Participant 1 was primarily focused on their family when they made the

decision to exit the school district. Money was also a factor in the decision-making process of

Participant 1 as they decided to leave the teaching profession for a more lucrative job. Family

dynamics led Participant 1 to seek more compensation and flexibility in a new career:

> Yeah, I mean the biggest thing, the biggest factors, my family, my wife, she also worked
>
> in the school system, and she left as to stay home with our daughter. The overriding
>
> factor number one was providing for her and my daughter. Number two was working for
>
> my family, with my family, with my father. There was new number three, I didn't enjoy
>
> leaving. I enjoyed my time in high school, still I'm close with a lot of people at the

school. I continued coaching up until literally about a month ago. We're having another

baby, so I stepped away again because the family factors and just to spend more time

with my family. Money, I guess you save money, for the third factor you know. Family

was the biggest one. Family by far and away was the biggest one. Being self-employed,

I'm able to make my own hours and, like, my wife is gone this weekend. She needed me

at home at three o'clock on Friday, I was able to make that happen with no problem.

The factor of family led Participant 4 away from the teaching profession. During the interview

the researcher noted the passion that Participant 4 demonstrated when discussing their career:

I love teaching and my plan originally, when I found out that I was pregnant (we're

starting a family) was that I would have my daughter and I would take my maternity

leave. It was going to work out well having her in the spring. I would have a full

maternity leave, then have my full summer off, and I would start back in the fall. Part of

it was just the emotional attachment of having her in my arms for the first time because I

truly thought I was going back to teaching until the day she was born. We kind of looked

at the reality of finances with teaching, insurance, and childcare because I was already

kind of feeling like I wanted to stay home. It didn't necessarily make sense to go back to

teaching at the time. Childcare was going to be about a thousand dollars a month and that

was even when I was not working because I would have to pay to hold her place through

the summer and then just insurance. So, you know having her there; it just wasn't worth it

– honestly financially it wasn't worth it.

Participant 7 decided to exit the school district after contemplating many factors during their

decision-making process. The primary factor in their decision to leave revolved around their

child:

My son, he has a cerebral palsy and so he has an IEP and it's just very hard to be able to

advocate for him and also be employed at the same place. You see your colleagues and

you have to switch hats and people are supposed to be able to do that, and that's a little bit

difficult.

Participant 11 was direct and straightforward about exiting the school district and public

education. The participant wanted to be a stay-at-home parent to be with their child:

There's nothing about the school that made my leave; I was just wanting to be home with

my baby and be there for all of the experiences that she would have.

Unforeseen life circumstances were a direct factor regarding the decision of Participant 9 to

relocate:

I know that it's an unfortunate position where my husband ended up with an issue. I had

to move back home and with my parents with two small kids. I tried to continue to work.

I was trying really hard. I drove an hour and a half both ways but in the end I just couldn't

take time away time from my kids that way.

Participant 3 exited the North Carolina school district and moved to another state where they

continued in the teaching profession. At the time of the interview Participant 3 was not employed

as a teacher and had decided on a career change. Relocation was the deciding factor for

Participant 3 to leave the North Carolina School district. Frustration with some decisions by

school administration, lack of follow-through, and the characteristics of their teaching

assignment were factors associated with the decision-making process for Participant 3:

I moved to another state, so that was not my last position. My last position was at a high

school, I only taught there for a semester. I got engaged and I moved.

Participant 8 was adamant about their admiration for the school administration, and offered a

short and direct response in describing their decision to exit the school district,

> "My husband, that's the only reason."
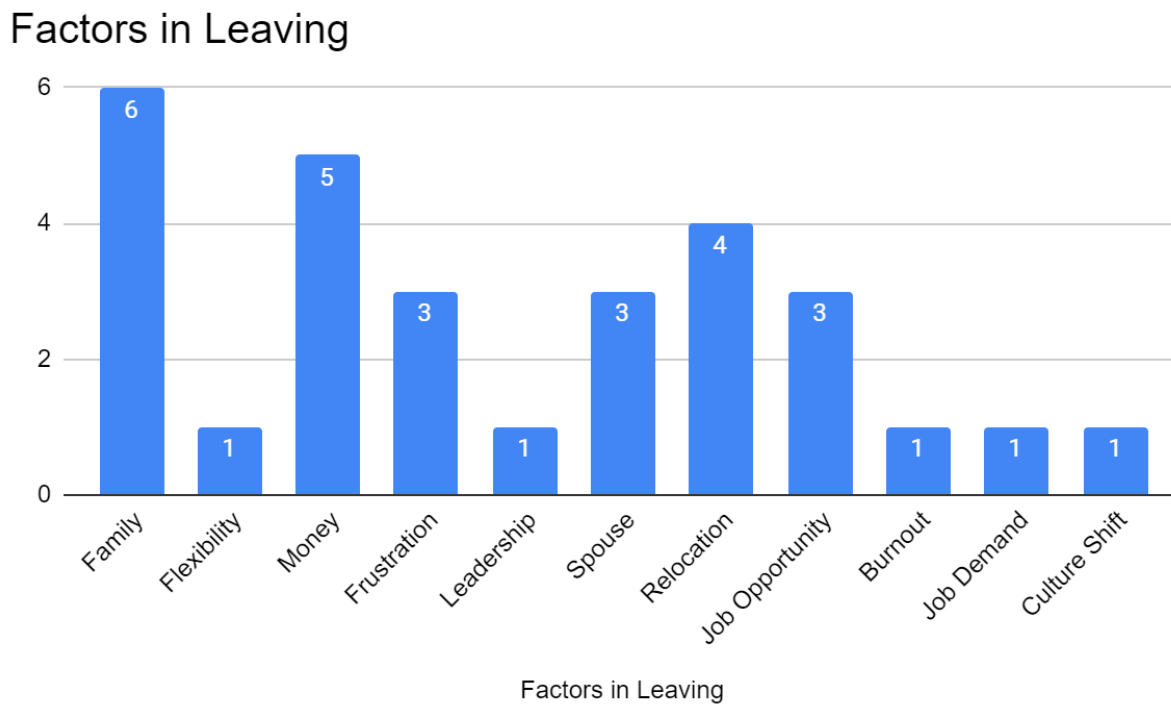
Compensation, family, and the unemployment of a spouse were all factors in the decision of

Participant 9 to relocate.

> "My husband became unemployed, and we were unable to find employment for him in
>
> his field and so we relocated back to Florida where we had lived prior to moving to North
>
> Carolina."

Figure 6

Factors in Leaving

Factors in Leaving

Factors in Leaving

Summary of Data Analysis

This chapter revealed the data collected in this qualitative study about the decision-making process of teachers who decided to exit a North Carolina school district and the factors associated with that process for each participant. The qualitative data were collected in the form of structured interview questions, researcher field notes, and recorded phone interviews. Data was categorized and coded to answer the three research questions and further analyzed to identify emergent themes. Guba (1978) states:

> No abstract processes of analysis, no matter how eloquently named and finely described, can substitute for the skill, knowledge, experience, creativity, diligence, and work of the qualitative analyst. The task of converting field notes and observations about issues and concerns into systematic categories is a difficult one. No infallible procedure exists for performing it.

Constructing a system of coding for the purpose of identifying patterns and themes is a critical first step of analysis (Patton, 2002). This requires the researcher to identify, code, classify, develop categories and label the prominent patterns that develop within the data (Patton, 2002). As the researcher started conducting interviews, the researcher also began the process of coding. The researcher thoroughly transcribed each verbal account of data. Transcriptions have been safely stored electronically and are available for review. Assessing the transcripts from obtained from the interviews enabled the researcher to evaluate data for emerging themes and coding categories. Patton (2002) notes that:

> The first reading through the data is aimed at developing the coding categories or classification system. Then a new reading is done to actually start the formal coding in a systematic way. Several readings of the data may be necessary before field notes or

interviews can be completely indexed or coded. In developing codes and categories, a

qualitative analyst must deal with the challenge of *convergence*, figuring out what things

fit together.

The initial coding process began with the researcher reading through the transcriptions of each

participant's responses to the structured interview questions. The researcher was focused on

gaining insight, generating notes, and establishing a coding classification system. The second

phase of the coding process involved the researcher thoroughly assessing each participant's

textual data retrieved from the interviews. During this process the researcher utilized the

electronic platform QDA Miner Lite to formally begin coding the data.

The data was evaluated by the researcher and systemically placed in the appropriate

categories. (Guba, 1978). Patton (2002) states,

Begin by looking for recurring regularities in the data. These regularities reveal patterns

that can be sorted into categories. Categories should then be judged by two criteria:

internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity. The first criterion concerns the extent to

which the data that belong in a certain category hold together or "dovetail in a

meaningful way. The second criterion concerns the extent to which differences among

categories are bold and clear.

The third phase of the coding process involved the researcher reviewing the data to

validate the categories that had been established through coding, and to determine if those

categories contained the appropriate data from the research study (Patton, 2002). The research

observed the data to identify the significance and interconnectedness of the data placed in the

coding classification system. The researcher meticulously evaluated the categories for recurring

patterns in the data to establish priority. Value, validity, and the meaningfulness determined the

significance of the classification schemes (Patton, 2002). The researcher continued to

contemplate how the coded data related to this study's three research questions and the literature

presented in the literature review. The data was revisited frequently throughout the data analysis

to verify accuracy and meaning.

Chapter 5. Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Discussion

The findings, conclusions, and implications of this qualitative research study, and the recommendations for practice and further research, are discussed and presented in Chapter 5. Chapters 1, 2, and 3, reveal the researcher's introduction to the topic, understanding the decision-making process of teachers who have decided to exit a North Carolina school district and the factors associated with that process for each participant. Chapter 1 includes the introduction, statement of the problem, significance of the problem, and research questions. Chapter 2 includes a literature review that focuses on influential factors and variables related to teacher attrition: Teacher Salaries, Role of School Leadership, Teacher Working Conditions, Teacher Preparation, and the Cost of Teacher Attrition. Chapter 3 provides the research plan for this study including the methodology, information on sampling and participants, data collection, and data analysis. Chapter 4 indicates the findings from this study, based on the thematic coding and analysis of interview data. Chapter 4 also includes the research methods used for this study, including information on sampling and participants, data collection, and data analysis procedures. This study produced data that was consistent with the influential factors to teacher attrition; teacher salaries, role of school leadership, teacher working conditions, teacher collaboration and teacher preparation. The study also produced data that revealed influential factors not replicated in the research detailed in the literature review of this research study.

The financial-challenge paradigm supports the belief that the primary reason for there not being enough teachers to meet the demand is because of poor compensation for teachers (Lasagna, 2009). This perspective continues to be consistently presented within the media as the main cause of teachers leaving the profession (Ramos & Hughes, 2020). The results from this

study provide in-depth and detailed insight into the factors associated with the decision-making process of teachers to exit a North Carolina school district. Some of the research participants noted money and compensation as being heavily factored into their decision to exit the school district. The data suggests that there were multiple factors that participants took into consideration during their decision-making process.

The researcher's notes, observations, and transcribed interviews reveal the cognition related to the decision-making process of the participants. The data produced by this study supports the premise that factors associated with teacher attrition are not equally weighed by teachers in their decisions to exit a school district. The data further suggests that factors affecting the decision-making process of the research participants may extend beyond the control of a school district. While participants were able to articulate influential factors relative to their decision making, they were also able to specifically identify a primary reason for their decision.

Conclusions

This qualitative investigation was guided by three research questions. Analysis of researcher notes, evaluation of textual data produced by interviews, and observations allowed the qualitative investigator to identify emerging themes and patterns to answer the research questions. The researcher notes that the conclusions and findings from this study may be used to direct all future research regarding the topics of teacher attrition, teacher turnover, and teacher shortages.

This study provided insight into the decision-making processes that former teachers of a North Carolina School district utilized in their decision to leave. This insight assisted the researcher in answering the following research questions:

1. What are the perceptions from teachers from a North Carolina School district regarding exiting the school district?

2. What was the decision-making process for teachers who decided to leave a North Carolina District?

3. What factors were associated with the decision-making process for teachers who decided to exit a North Carolina School District?

Below the researcher has detailed the conclusions for each of the three research questions.

Research Question 1

The researcher analyzed all types of data and compiled them utilizing QDA Miner Lite to code and identify emerging themes and patterns effectively. The participants were asked to describe the culture of the school where they last taught. The themes that emerged relative to the participants' perceptions of the culture at their school, the researcher coded the following: collaborative, family oriented, fragmented, high-achieving, positive, diverse, stressful and high need. Eight of the 15 research participants described the culture of their school as collaborative and/or family oriented. All of the research participants were positive in their demeanor when describing the culture of the work environment within their school.

Participants were also asked about feedback and support from the school administration at their respective schools when they were employed by the North Carolina school district. Twelve of the fifteen participants stated they felt supported by school leadership. Six of the twelve participants who indicated that their school administration was supportive, also noted that they felt like the feedback they received about job performance was insufficient. The emerging theme from research participants revealed that while they found school administration to be helpful and supportive, they felt like the feedback was insufficient due to the job demand on

administrators. When describing suggestions to improve the work environment within the school district, the emergent theme was to build culture.

Research Question 2

The second research question focused on the decision-making process of the research participants and their decision to exit a North Carolina School district. Most of the participants spoke about situations involving life changes that impacted their decision. Participants noted family, relocation, job opportunities, and spouses as factors that they took into consideration during their decision-making process. Each participant presented similar factors that were involved in the cognitive process of their decision. The account given by each participant about exiting the school district was uniquely different. The research concluded most of the research participants involved in this study exited the school district for reasons that were unique to them. Thirteen out of the fifteen participants noted that there is nothing that the school district could have done to retain them in their role. This can be summed up from direct statement from Participant 1.

> You know honestly at the end of the day that was the thing, financially I could, and I knew that me. Although I made a career switch, I already was working part time, so it was a tough transition at all. I kind of hit the ground running so there wasn't really in my situation a whole lot they could do I was going to work with family and doing something that I already had a ton of experience with. Obviously, they don't have the ability to pay what you want, they couldn't hit the number that I provided obviously.

During the interview process, the researcher noted how most of the research participants did not arrive at an abrupt decision to leave the school district. Although each participant's

decision-making process was different and weighed certain factors differently, most participants were able to analyze their situations and make a decision after some time.
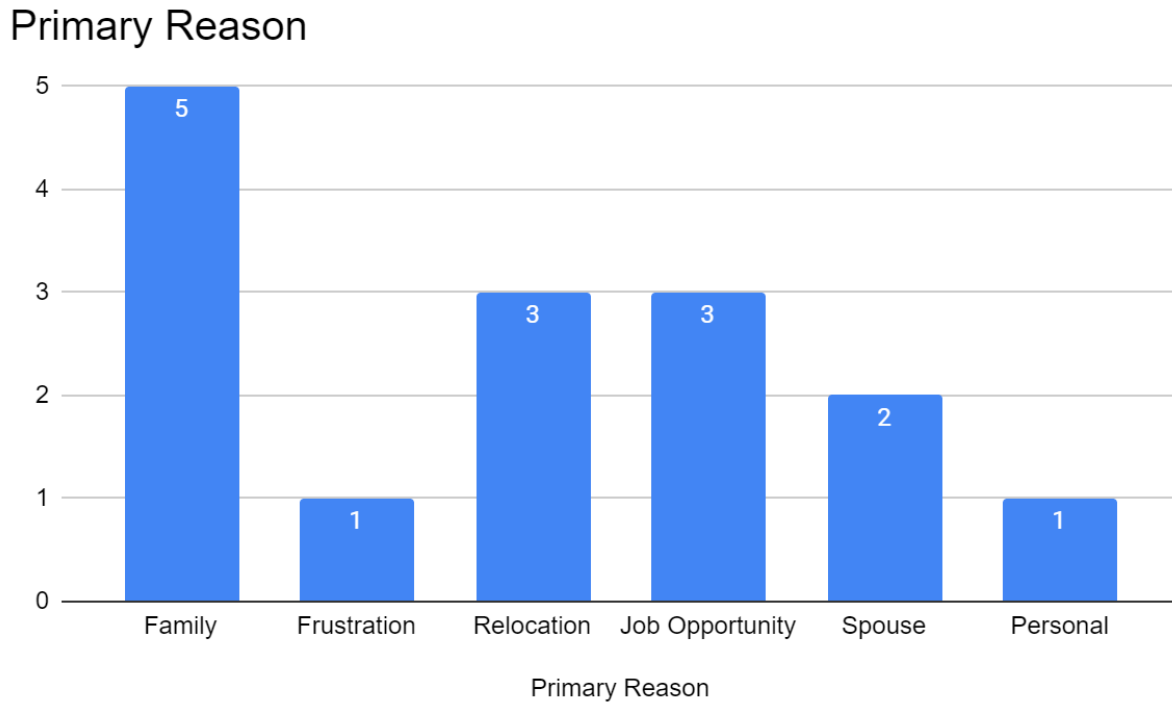
Research Question 3

The third research question determined what factors were associated with the participants' decisions to exit a NCSD. The review of literature detailed the following influential factors associated with teacher attrition: Teacher Salaries, Role of School Leadership, Teacher Working Conditions, Teacher Collaboration, Teacher Preparation, Cost of Teacher Attrition, and Strengthening of the Teacher Workforce. The factors of family, frustration, spouse, job opportunity, money, teacher burnout, relocation, job demand, job flexibility, leadership, and cultural shirt were associated with participants' decisions to exit the NCSD.

Family, relocation, job opportunity, and spouse were the prominent factors that emerged from the data. Five participants identified family as their primary reason for exiting the school district. Three participants noted relocation as their primary reason. Job opportunities was the main reason for another three of the research participants, while spouses were the main factor for two other participants. Frustration and personal decision were the primary factors stated by one participant each. (See Figure 7)

Figure 7

Primary Reason for Exit

Primary Reason

(Bar chart showing Primary Reason counts)

Primary Reason	Count
Family	5
Frustration	1
Relocation	3
Job Opportunity	3
Spouse	2
Personal	1

Recommendations

Recommendations for Future Research

This research study has produced findings that support further research on the topic of teacher attrition. The emerging themes identified in this study can be utilized by future investigators to further understand why teachers decide to exit their respective school districts. The phenomenological approach to this study was beneficial to understanding the decision-making process of teachers exiting a school district and the factors associated with those decisions. Sampling was a limitation to the findings of this research study. Involving more than fifteen research participants would increase the reliability of the findings. Time constraints and logistics were factors in creating the small group of participants. The small number of participants in this study limit generalization to a larger population of teachers.

The implementation of a qualitative study for research of teacher attrition offers a depth of insight into data but limits data analysis and generalizations due to sample size. The data collected in this research study was rich and meaningful. Future researchers should consider utilizing different methodology that allows for the increase in research participants across the teaching profession. A quantitative research design with a systematic approach has the ability to produce reliable and accurate data. A quantitative approach can allow for scholars, educators, and investigators can be more responsive to emergent themes and patterns regarding teacher attrition with the expeditious collection and analysis of research data. Future research on teacher attrition should also include how the pandemic of Covid-19 has impacted teachers choosing to leave education profession. The spread of the coronavirus presented public schools at all levels with significant challenges (Irwin et al., 2021).

Future researchers should follow the advice of the principal investigator and expand their research to factors associated with the following,

- Teachers who exit from one school district to another school district in the same state

- Teachers who exit from one school district to a school district in another state

- Teachers who exit a school district and decide to leave the teaching profession

Capturing research on this type of data can provide critical information that impacts how central office personnel in school systems approach the challenges of teacher attrition, teacher shortages, and teacher turnover.

Recommendations for Future Practice

It is the recommendation of the principal investigator that the future practices of school personnel at the district office level include developing exit interviews to identify emerging themes and patterns related to teacher attrition. Following this recommendation can assist school district personnel with being more effective in their practices of teacher retention efforts by identifying factors associated with teachers' decisions to exit their school districts. Implementing exit interviews will allow for the quick collection of data, and school district personnel will be able to conduct statistical analysis in a timely manner.

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APPENDIX: Interview Questions

Interview Questions

1. How many years of teaching experience do you have?
2. How many years did you teach in Carolina School System?
3. What is the highest degree you have been awarded?
4. Are you National Board Certified?
5. What position did you hold at your time of departure from Carolina School System?
6. How many years did you teach in the school you left?
7. Describe the culture of the school that you last resided in within Carolina School System?
8. What was your primary reason for leaving the Carolina School System?
9. What factored into your decision to leave the Carolina School System?
10. What was most satisfying about your job?
11. Describe the factors that made your job undesirable and lead you to exit the school division?
12. Describe the level of support that you received in doing your job?
13. Did you receive sufficient feedback about your performance?
14. What suggestions do you have for improving the work environment within the Carolina School System?
15. Were you happy with your pay benefits, and other incentives?
16. What would have better prepared you to work in the school you left?
17. Would you consider working again for Carolina School System in the future? Would you recommend working for Carolina School System to your family and friends?
18. Could Carolina School System have done anything to encourage you to stay?

VITA

PRESTON JEROME CLARKE

Education: Ed.D. Educational Leadership, East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, Tennessee 2022

M. S. School Administration, Western Carolina University Cullowhee, North Carolina 2014

B.S. Health Education K-12, Appalachian State University, Boone, NC 2006

B.S. History Secondary Education, Appalachian State University, Boone, NC 2006

Professional Experience: Principal, Bunker Hill High School; Claremont, North Carolina, 2021 - Present

Principal, Lincolnton High School; Lincolnton, North Carolina, 2019 – 2021

Principal, Valle Crucis School; Sugar Grove, North Carolina, 2014 – 2019

Assistant Principal, Watauga High School, Boone, North Carolina, 2011 - 2014

Social Studies Teacher, Watauga High School, Boone, North Carolina, 2009 – 2011

AVID Elective Teacher, Maiden High School, Maiden, North Carolina 2006 - 2009

Honors and Awards: Watauga County Schools Principal of the Year, 2017