An Investigative Study Related to Teacher Retention and The Factors Associated with

Persistence in the Field of Education

By

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Dedication

To my mom, for teaching me the value of hard work. Through your hard work, you instilled in me a sense of pride. You have inspired me to always finish what I start, and you have led by example. I am the woman I am today because of your grit, determination, support, and love.

To my dad, the one who always shared a positive outlook on life. Your joy and optimism are contagious. Watching you and Mom serve others has allowed me to model that same type of love in my own family and my career.

To my husband and son for all of the support you have provided along the way. Both of you have made sacrifices in order for me to pursue my dreams, and I hope in return that I have provided for you first and foremost as a wife, mother, and friend. Your understanding, support, and pride in my work have allowed me to serve others, and I am forever grateful for the opportunities God has given me to serve as a leader in our family, our church, and our community.

To my extended family, thank you for supporting me in this endeavor by providing transportation and supervision for Riley. I always know he is well cared for whenever my schedule gets chaotic. Your continued encouragement and interest in my journey has been a great support as well.

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willingness to work hard day in and day out has inspired me to be the best version of myself so that I can provide the best leadership to you and our students each day. Working alongside you is one of my greatest blessings. Additionally, capacity building by current and former mentors has helped shape my path, and I am grateful for the push that those individuals have provided.

Abstract

This qualitative study aimed to explore and better understand the perceived factors that positively influence teacher retention rates amongst educators in a rural school district in Northeast Tennessee. Knowing that researchers have examined the recent decline in teacher retention rates, few studies have been conducted to truly assess what motivates teachers to persist in the profession, which in turn has placed limits on educational leaders concerning the necessary supports put in place by school systems across the nation to improve teacher retention. Therefore, this study determined which resources were most valuable to elementary school teachers in a rural school district in Northeast Tennessee. The theoretical framework for the study was based on the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model as the researcher set out to uncover which resources/factors were considered most helpful to educators when it comes to overcoming the job demands of the teaching profession. Understanding that the JD-R model suggests that increased job resources lead to greater retention of employees, the researcher utilized the data gathered from 10 one-on-one interviews with elementary school teachers who had persisted beyond the five-year mark in the field of education. The results of the qualitative interviews were coded and analyzed. The 10 interviews yielded the following themes: Opportunities and fulfillment from influencing others, relationships formed with students, families, and colleagues, family-friendly schedules, and the collaborative nature of the profession. The findings of this study provide educational leaders with resources that can be utilized to encourage greater persistence of educators in the district studied and beyond. Continued research should include teachers at the middle and high school levels, special area teachers, and teachers of those with special needs further to grasp correlations among grade bands and subject areas. Gathering data from recently retired teachers could also provide

educational leaders with valuable insight regarding resources that led to persistence.

Additionally, analyzing exit interviews to determine what resources were missing in the lives of

those who chose not to persist in education could also be of value.

Keywords: retention, persist, demands, resources

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Teacher attrition is the percentage of teachers exiting the educational profession in a given school year (Schreiner, E., 2017). According to research from Garcia and Weiss (2019), the overall teacher shortage has risen from no need in 2013 to over 110,000 vacancies. According to more recent reports by the Annenberg Institute at Brown University, 36,000 vacancies still exist in 2023, in addition to the 163,000 positions that are filled by workers who are not qualified for the jobs in which these individuals have been placed. Overall, this equates to around 200,000 positions in jeopardy within the field of education. Not only does it appear that teachers are leaving the profession, but research also shows that the number of prospective teachers entering teacher preparation programs has declined (Will, 2022).

On the other hand, teacher retention is used to categorize those who have stayed in the profession each year. Educators who have remained in the field could have remained in one's current position, moved to another grade level or subject area, or could have made other lateral or vertical moves. Regardless, the percentage of educators who remain in the field each year is considered the retention rate. Understanding the difference between attrition rates and retention rates is of great importance. Furthermore, a better understanding of the reasoning behind each is of even greater importance to bring more stability to the profession. Not only will a better understanding of the reasoning behind attrition and retention benefit the field of education since districts will be better equipped with the knowledge necessary for improving retention rates among educators, but it will also greatly benefit the students in many ways, which we will

explore further within this study. Furthermore, stability in education will impact other professions as students are more likely to experience greater educational success, both academically and socially, leading to greater understanding and expertise for our future societies. In understanding that trends in teacher retention are declining, educational leaders need to study trends specific to educators who have remained in the profession to experience an incline in the rate of retention eventually.

Statement of the Problem

According to a MetLife Survey of American Teachers, only twelve percent report being "very satisfied" with their job (Tillman, 2022). An increase in the number of teachers leaving the profession nationwide has created a shortage of teachers (TN Department of Education, 2020). These reports verify the problem that schools and districts face regarding teacher turnover. In researching the reasons for attrition, studies have uncovered several reasons teachers have left the profession. In contrast, the factors that enhance teacher job retention vary from educator to educator. There is no "one-size-fits-all" approach to improving retention rates. Thus, educational leaders must explore why those persisting in the profession have done so. If such factors are not uncovered and highlighted within individual districts, educational leaders will continue to face problems with retaining educators from year to year.

Purpose of the Study

This study aims to explore and better understand teacher experiences and the factors that have positively influenced persistence in the field among educators in a rural school district in Northeast Tennessee. Factors to be explored include personal factors, job-related factors, organizational factors, and external factors. This study's Personal factors include demographics, personality, family influences, expectations and aspirations, and work-life balance. Job-related

factors will include teaching conditions, schedules, autonomy and control, opportunities for collaboration and professional development, compensation, and benefits. Organizational factors will encompass educators' thoughts about leadership and management, school culture and climate, and social interaction and relationships among co-workers and the school community. External factors such as government involvement and community support will also be analyzed. Additionally, teacher efficacy and job tenure will also be explored. Overall, this study will uncover factors that have led teachers to remain in the profession. The findings from this study will assist educational leaders by uncovering ways to maintain teachers' motivation levels, which, in turn, can positively impact the retention of educators.

This study will help researchers better understand the dynamics of longevity among teachers in greater detail. Overall, this study will allow researchers to uncover the correlations between job demands (e.g., workload, stress) and job resources (e.g., support, autonomy) pertaining to retention as they relate to the Job Demands-Resources Model developed by researchers Arnold Bakker and Evangelia Demerouti. Furthermore, this approach will allow researchers to see the positive factors associated with the education profession that offset the effects of high job demands associated with teaching. Lastly, this study will identify strategies administrators can use to promote teacher persistence.

Research Questions

Aim 1: What are the personal experiences of teachers who have remained in teaching positions?

Aim 2: What are the job-related experiences that have contributed to staying in the profession?

Aim 3: What organizational experiences have contributed to staying in the profession?

Aim 4: What external factors have contributed to staying in the profession?

Aim 5: What steps do veteran teachers recommend that school and district leaders take to improve teacher retention rates?

Significance of the Study

To increase teacher retention rates, this qualitative study will explore why and how select educators in a public school district in Northeast Tennessee have remained persistent in the profession. Once results are analyzed, the findings will be shared with the participating and surrounding school districts to provide recommendations for increasing teacher retention. The hope is that this will lead to improved leadership practices throughout school districts in Northeast Tennessee, allowing districts to create environments that foster teacher persistence. Overall, it has been said that schools cannot become the best places for students to grow and learn until schools are the best places for teachers to work and grow. Therefore, examining the personal and professional factors that educators find most influential to retention is of great interest to those in the education field.

Theoretical Framework

For this study, the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model will be utilized to uncover what resources teachers deem most influential in supporting the work they do each day. Moreover, this framework will allow educational leaders to analyze and improve employee well-being. The study will explore resources (i.e., job positives) and factors that motivate teachers to remain in the profession as school leaders seek to find how the demands and resources of teaching relate to the strain and motivation levels that accompany the profession as depicted in figure 1 (Bakker & Demerouti, 2006).

Figure 1

The JD-R Model Representation
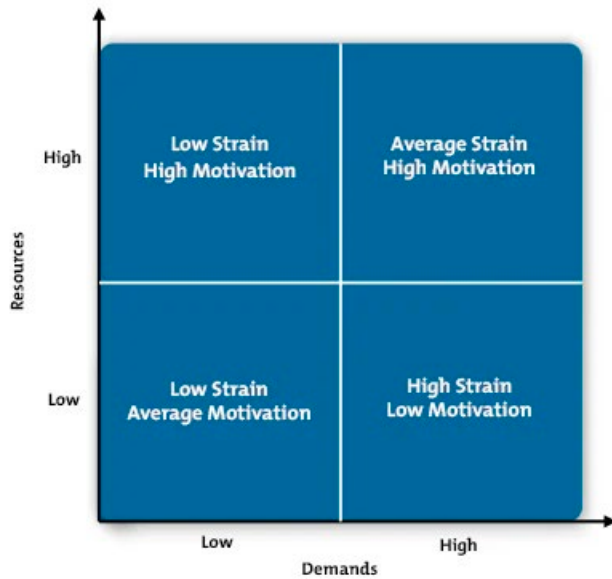
Additionally, this study will focus on what makes people (specifically teachers) happy in the profession and what provisions of the job allow them to persist. Qualitative data will be collected, coded, and analyzed for common conceptualizations. This will allow the researcher to make recommendations to educational leaders within a rural school district to provide an environment for educators that addresses the major needs that must be met for retention.

Definition of Terms

Attrition: Calculation of teachers exiting the educational profession in a given school year (Madumere-Obike et al.)

Teacher Retention: A teacher remaining in one's school and/or current position in the field of education. Retention means that staff are kept in the workplace year after year. Retention rates are calculated on a yearly basis to assess whether or not attrition rates are rising or falling. Researchers then use this information to look further into factors that positively or negatively affect teacher retention rates.

Turnover: The rate at which personnel whose primary function is classroom teaching leave or separate from the district or change from their classroom teaching to another position from one school year to another, expressed as a percentage. This rate is determined by comparing the classroom teachers reported in the current year against those reported in the previous year (*Definitions of selected terms,* 2022).

Persistence: The tendency to continue on, steadfastly, in the course of action that constitutes teaching (Wheatley, 2002).

Personal Factors: Influences in one's personal life that have impacted one's decision to stay in the field of education

Job-Related Factors: Influences associated with the makeup of the teaching profession as a whole

Organizational Factors: Influences specific to/at the school and/or district level.

External Factors: Governmental and community influences and/or shifts.

Psychological Needs: Needs that are important for psychological well-being and autonomous motivation. Three of the most common include autonomy, competence, and relatedness. (Gil-Flórez et al., 2022).

Physiological Needs: Essential needs such as water, food, and shelter. This includes having a place to work, a regular monthly salary, a comfortable working environment, and essential facilities in place (Thomson).

Job Demands: Stressors that could have a negative effect on a team of employees. The physical, psychological, social, and organizational aspects of the job that require sustained physical and/or psychological effort and are therefore associated with certain physiological and/or psychological costs ("Job Demands," n.d.).

Job Positives: Aspects of a job that act as a buffer between team members and the demands of their roles ("The JD-R," n.d.).

Limitations of the Study

Although this study examined teachers at the elementary level in a rural public school district in Northeast Tennessee, more input from various grade bands, subject areas, special areas, and school districts from various demographic locations could uncover additional information regarding teachers' ability to persist in the field. Expanding this study to various subgroups in the district or other districts in the surrounding area could bring about a broader scope, leading to more strongly supported connections. In addition, unknown personal hindrances and/or current extenuating circumstances could impact teacher responses at various points within the study.

Organization of the Study

This study begins with Chapter 1, which presents an introduction to the study, including a statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, the theoretical framework basis for the study, research questions pertaining to the factors surrounding teacher retention, the significance or future impact of the study, and a definition of terms to enhance the comprehension of the study. Chapter 2 encompasses an in-depth review of relevant literature and research pertaining to the statistical findings associated with teacher attrition and retention. Additionally, the review of literature looks more in-depth at research pertaining to personal factors, job-related factors, organizational factors, and external factors associated with teacher retention. Moreover, chapter 2 provides additional information about the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model and how this model allows educational leaders to know the factors that motivate educators the most.

Chapter 3 explains the methodology and procedures used to gather qualitative data. Chapter 4 provides an overview of the data upon analysis and common findings from the study. Chapter 5 presents a summary of the findings, a discussion of results, recommendations that educational leaders can put into practice to increase teacher retention rates, and future suggestions for further research.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Introduction

The Great Falling Away: Turnover Rates of US Businesses

As defined by the Society of Human Resources Management, turnover is "the rate at which employees move in and out of a company. This metric is measured by the number of separations in a month divided by the average number of employees on payroll, multiplied by 100," (Shrm, 2021). Regarding recent US studies, the average turnover rate for businesses in 2022 was calculated and reported at 25%. Furthermore, it has been reported that "More than 19 million US workers, and counting, have quit their jobs since April 2021, a record pace disturbing businesses everywhere" (Smet et al., 2021). Additionally, 56% of organizations admit to struggling when it comes to hiring and retaining employees (Smet et al., 2021). These statistics make it clear why it is so important for employers to examine turnover rates to help organizations make necessary adjustments (2023). Not only should company leaders take these statistics seriously, but leaders must also desire an understanding of employees' most highly weighted personal and professional influences (Smet et al., 2021). In the words of researchers with McKinsey and Company, "The bottom line: The Great Attrition is happening, it is widespread and likely to persist - if not accelerate - and many companies do not understand what is happening, despite their best efforts. These companies make ineffective moves based on faulty assumptions" (Smet et al., 2021).

The Numbers & Impact on the Teaching Profession

As nearly all businesses have experienced an uptick in turnover rates, schools are no exception. The growing issue of teacher turnover has negatively impacted school districts and

human resources departments nationwide. Delving further into the numbers, 30% of teachers exit the profession within the first five years, 84% of whom do so voluntarily (Kusy & O'Leary-Driscoll, 2020). That percentage is alarming compared to the combination of other industries, which report only a 17% voluntary employee resignation rate, according to the 2022 US Mercer Turnover Survey (2023). Additionally, Kusy and O'Leary-Driscoll (2020) find a startling difference in the retirement age of teachers versus those in other professions, as only 26% of teachers make it to retirement age compared to 54% of other public employees. A 2022 National Education Association (NEA) poll found that 55% of educators plan to leave the profession sooner than each had initially expected (Walker, 2022). Novice teachers, in particular, are among the majority who leave teaching early (Loewus et al., 2021), which only reinforces that over half of those in education do not remain in the profession until retirement. Furthermore, the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education reported the number of students obtaining a degree in education dropped by more than a third between 2018 and 2019 (Chirichella, 2022). This drop in educator preparatory program enrollment and high turnover rates strains the teaching profession.

Along with the impact of high turnover rates on the profession, the cost of recruiting new teachers is one issue that schools and districts face (Ronfeldt et al., 2013). Such high turnover rates also interrupt the organizational structure and cohesion of the school/district community among faculty, staff, students, and families, negatively influencing teachers remaining in the organization as work conditions shift (Casely-Hayford et al., 2022). Such influences on remaining teachers then tend to lead to a spiral effect, which further intensifies turnover (Casely-Hayford et al., 2022).

Impacts on Students/Families

According to the Learning Policy Institute, the negative impact observed regarding students' educational achievements is more concerning as it correlates to teacher turnover (*Teacher Retention: Preventing teacher turnover*, 2022). In addition to the personal struggles of the teachers and the struggles districts are finding in filling teacher vacancies, students and families are also burdened about the quality of education children receive due to increased teacher turnover. For example, whenever teachers leave the field, many districts are forced to fill vacancies with inexperienced or unqualified personnel, leaving families with decreased instructional outcomes since less effective instruction is delivered to students (Simon & Johnson, 2015). A 2020 study published by *AERA Open* found that high teacher turnover yielded notable drops in students' academic performance, particularly in reading and math (*Teacher Retention: Preventing teacher turnover,* 2022). These statistics point to a negative impact on student academic achievement. Not only does a lack of teachers' qualifications negatively impact students' learning, but increased class sizes have also become a factor as leaders have looked for ways of implementing structural changes to offset the vacancies that districts are experiencing. Additionally, reductions in course offerings are a procedural change that districts are facing and attempting to implement due to the overarching problem of teacher retention (Collins & Schaaf, 2022).

In addition to academics, teacher turnover also affects students' emotional well-being. Since educators can serve as beloved mentors or role models, students often struggle emotionally when someone a student have grown close to is removed from the student's daily life. This change can decrease social and academic engagement for students, coinciding with a drop in grades and test scores (*Teacher retention: Preventing teacher turnover*, 2022). Researchers such as Freudenberger (1974) have also found that teachers on the verge of exiting the profession

exhibit behavioral symptoms such as mood swings, paranoia, irritation, frustration, stubbornness, depression, and cynicism, which in turn cause the teacher's current students to suffer as well. According to the research, if teacher retention rates improved, students would be better supported socially, physically, and academically. Thus, improved investments in students' overall well-being would be more achievable given the extended tenure and stability that can and should be brought to the profession.

Retention and Persistence

When it comes to longevity, turnover rates are not what businesses and organizations hope will persist. Instead, industries facing the highest percentage of turnover, specifically those in education, are looking at employee persistence and the influences thereof. As former President Calvin Coolidge exclaimed, "Nothing in the world can take the place of persistence. Talent will not; nothing is more common than unsuccessful men with talent. Genius will not; unrewarded genius is almost a proverb. Education will not; the world is full of educated derelicts. Persistence and determination alone are omnipotent," (Wheatley, 2002). Therefore, educational leaders are looking for teachers who will persist or continue in one's career regardless of the difficulties that accompany the job demands.

Overall, this study derives its relevance from a lack of understanding as it pertains to personal factors, job-related factors, organizational factors, and external factors in the profession of education that most positively influence persistence among educators. Seeing that most research has been conducted on factors associated with burnout or a lack of satisfaction, this study focuses, instead, on ways to retain teachers by first realizing that teacher retention is of great importance to the success of students and the school/district as a whole. With this understanding, leaders must know the current trends within the field; thus, an in-depth literature

review on retention will provide that information. Ultimately, this study of the literature

surrounding motivating factors related to retention will set out to better define some of the most

commonly agreed-upon resources and conditions that promote persistence among educators.

Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model

The Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model was created in 2006 by researchers Arnold

Bakker and Evangelia Demerouti and will be utilized as a guiding framework for the research

surrounding job demands and resources within the world of education (Bakker & Demerouti,

2007). This model focuses on job demands and job resources and the correlations thereof.

Specifically, the JD-R model examines situations to assess how high or low job demands and

resources are within a given profession and among individual employees, understanding that

every person on a given team embodies unique needs, desires, and threshold levels associated

with stressors. The Mind Tools Content Team says, " Something that causes extreme stress for

one person might just be an inconvenience - or even a work enabler - for someone else" (Bakker

& Demerouti, 2007).

As with much of today's research, an exhaustive list of the most common job demands is

well-known to those in education. Therefore, the next step of the JD-R model consists of

identifying and promoting the job resources (also referred to as job positives) that "act as a buffer

between your team members and the demands of their roles" (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Job

resources refer to those physical, psychological, social, or organizational aspects of the job that

assist employees in achieving work goals, reducing the effects of job demands and the associated

physiological and psychological costs. Thus, according to Bakker and Demerouti, not only is it

important to identify these resources, but education leaders must so to offset the effects of the

physical, psychological, social, or organizational demands of the job that require sustained effort

or skills associated with certain costs which most likely are inevitable in the field of education

(Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Hence, it is assumed that job resources have motivational

potential that leads to high work engagement, low cynicism, and excellent performance, making

it even more important to uncover and understand the most important job resources, according to

educators to reduce turnover.

Most Common Factors for Increased Teacher Retention

As previously stated, knowing the job demands that prompt teachers to leave the

profession is vital. Still, research targeting the job resources that positively prevent teacher

turnover is of greatest importance when changing the narrative of increased attrition. That being

the case, researchers point to talent management as step one. Talent management is defined as

the "attracting, developing, and retaining of employees" (Brandt, 2011, p. 1). Brandt and others

allude to the fact that talent management develops a pipeline of highly effective professionals,

which yields and ensures a culture of engagement and productivity within an organization, and

as educational leaders, that is what each one is hopeful to achieve at the school and district level.

Therefore, delving further into the research, one can uncover possible factors that attract,

develop, and promote teacher retention, often referred to as utilized resources. Those include but

are not limited to:

1) Personal factors such as personality traits, individual and family circumstances, and
    ability to promote self-care and work-life balance.

2) Job-related factors associated with teaching such as the opportunity to be a part of a
    collaborative workforce and the physical benefits of the job.

3) Organizational factors related to administrative support and leadership style, social interaction among coworkers, and positive climate and culture of the school and/or district.

4) External factors such as political shifts in education and community perceptions of teachers.

Personal Factors

Personality Traits

When it comes to personal factors that positively influence job retention of teachers, one area of research focuses on intrinsic motivations and self-efficacy of those who remain in the profession (Alexander et al., 2020). Case study research performed by Ji. Y. Hong (2012) states that teachers with stronger self-efficacy beliefs are more prone to remaining in the profession than those who doubt the capacity to exhibit behaviors and personality traits necessary for the desired performance. As defined by The American Psychological Association, "Self-efficacy reflects confidence in one's ability to exert control over one's own motivation, behavior, and social environment" (Carey & Foresyth, 2009). Teacher self-efficacy is a personal, positive resource that specifically aids in influencing a teacher's ability to effectively handle tasks, obligations, challenges, and overall job demands related to professional circumstances. Therefore, a teacher's self-efficacy plays a key role in influencing the well-being of one's work environment, which can positively impact one's willingness to remain (Barni et al., 2019). According to the research of Djigico et al. (2014), teachers with higher levels of openness and conscientiousness reported a stronger sense of efficacy. This information alludes to the fact that personality traits influence self-efficacy, which, in turn, can influence one's views on persistence in the field.

In addition to strong self-efficacy, research also points to high emotional intelligence as a personality trait that persistent individuals possess (Gunn & McRae, 2021). This trait allows educators and others to adaptively regulate one's emotions to the demands that lead to stress and burnout. Teachers who can focus on joy, professional and personal satisfaction, and positive empathy as opposed to negativity display a sense of emotional intelligence, which is a personal resource that is vital when it comes to combatting job demands (Martínez-Monteagudo et al., 2019)

Teachers who exemplify resiliency are also more prone to persist in the profession (Gunn & McRae, 2021). When faced with heightened situational difficulty, "a resilient teacher can adjust to the most adverse situations and adaptively manage their stress by being functional and proactive. Resilient teachers typically have a positive self-image, are persistent and tenacious, and build strong personal and working relationships with others" (Mansfield et al., 2014). Since resiliency embodies professional commitment, strong problem-solving skills, positive thinking, superb communication skills, and effective stress management, Gunn and McRae (2021) summarize the importance of personality traits related to self-regulation and self-actualization by stating, "While many personal factors contribute to a successful launch into the teaching profession, resiliency is one of the most important characteristics when combatting attrition."

Family and Individual Influences

Personality traits alone do not comprise the entirety of personal factors influencing persistence in education. Another factor influencing persistency may also include family dynamics, such as intergenerational history in teaching. As found by data collected from the National Longitudinal Survey on Youth and the Child and Young Adults Supplement, children

of mothers in the teaching profession were nine percent more likely to enter the field of teaching

as opposed to those whose mothers were not educators (Jacinto & Gershenson, 2019).

Quantitative data gathered from one hundred ninety-five Alberto teachers also showed

the importance of family and time as it pertains to self-care, seeing that 35% of teachers

surveyed chose "time for family/self-care" as the top personal need in one's teaching assignment,

showcasing that historical and current family influences do, to some extent, impact teacher

persistence (Gunn & McRea, 2021). Participants of this same study expressed the importance of

a life outside of school that brings joy and time to compartmentalize demands and resources so

that teachers can be at their best mentally and physically for the students each day. Realizing

that teachers oversee the care of students who have experienced adverse childhood trauma, it is

understandable why teachers experience compassion fatigue similar to that of emergency

personnel (Cocker and Joss, 2016). This emotional responsibility is a job demand that adversely

affects teachers; therefore, individuals who focus on self-care interventions to cope with such

duties are of great importance, further explaining why teachers state that compartmentalization

of stressors is necessary. Cocker and Joss (2016) suggest self-care interventions such as yoga,

structured meditation, music therapy, and programs focused on building resiliency and self-

efficacy to meet educators' self-care needs specifically. All-in-all, personality traits, family

influences, and individual self-care influences are a few of the personal factors that have been

shown to impact teacher persistence.

Job-Related Factors

Collaboration Opportunities

In looking past personal influences that promote persistence in education, an additional

portion of teacher feedback on retention focuses on job-specific factors, the first being that the

teaching profession lends itself so well to the possibility of collaboration. Thus, researchers such as Caen and Redecker (2019) support the idea that collaboration increases retention, seeing that the teaching profession allows for such a resource versus other professions that bring about a sense of isolation, loneliness, or unappreciation by colleagues. Others, such as Alonso-Garca et al. (2019), report a commonality among teachers in various subject areas, grade levels, and countries worldwide, stating that those who feel a part of a supportive community are more likely to persist. Thus, it appears that schools and districts can consider initiatives that encourage more support and collaboration among educators to retain teachers and improve student learning, and this can be accomplished through strategies such as mentor programs, the carving out of intentional time for sharing of materials and resources, access to training programs and strong professional development, etc. Teachers interviewed as part of the Tennessee Teacher Retention Listening Tour spoke in favor of the benefits of mentorship and continuous collaboration and the positive growth that educators can achieve within the profession of education (2023). Researchers such as Norton, Kotter, and others who have taken the time to consider teachers' desire for collaboration have agreed that cooperative decision-making, teacher surveys, and forming a guiding coalition go a long way concerning success within the profession (Aldemir, 2010). Moreover, educators who collaborate are more determined and prepared to experience success when said teachers experience a sense of belonging and attachment to other people. Thus, the connectedness and relatedness that come from collaboration efforts specific to the teaching profession appear to be fulfilling to most educators, and such fulfillment breeds persistence.

Benefits

Other aspects of the teaching profession that influence retention circulate perceived benefits such as stability, schedule, and retirement incentives. According to some within and outside the profession, "Teaching offers a reliable, stable salary, health benefits, and a pension," labeling the profession a 'job for life' (2uadmin, 2022). Subsequently, The United States Bureau of Labor Statistics projects a 4% employee growth potential for elementary school teachers during ten years between 2019 and 2029. Furthermore, from this same study, high school teachers can expect a 3% growth during that same period (2023). These statistics positively influence the assumption that such resources are of value not only to current educators but those who will be joining the ranks in the coming years.

Regarding teachers' schedules, the profession allows teachers to pursue positions that include a year-round schedule with intermittent breaks or a traditional 180-day schedule that includes one longer break, usually over the summer. Either way, educators in the United States can earn between 13 and 26 days of annual leave per year on top of built-in breaks (2009). In addition to these benefits, teachers in most states enjoy health insurance, a state pension plan that offers the assurance of a monthly paycheck, and in some states, social security benefits. Additionally, pension plans are a job resource that promotes persistence, providing advantages to staying employed longer as one's monthly pension increases based on the number of years in the system (Western Governors University, 2021). Understanding that these benefits exist for teachers, debates still circulate regarding whether pension plans are properly structured to benefit teachers in the best way possible. Thus, further research and qualitative study will measure such plans' impact on retention measures.

Organization Factors

Administrative Support & Leadership Style

In looking at the next tier of factors related to the organization for which a teacher is employed, many studies allude to the importance of responsive and supportive building-level leadership for facilitating retention (Day & Gu, 2009). Specifically, researchers from Central Michigan University and Georgia State University point to school leadership practices as the strongest determining factor of job satisfaction and retention, especially in high-needs schools (Ansley et al., 2019). Moreover, teachers have made known the importance of leadership when it comes to "consistent enforcement of school policies, support for student behavior management, regular communication, constructive feedback, flexibility for teacher autonomy, teacher inclusion in school-wide decision making, allocation of necessary resources, and mentorships for new teachers," (Ansley et al., 2019, p. 4). Additionally, Arnold and Bakker (2007) defend the assumption that leaders' appreciation and support through the various resources mentioned above may also assist workers in coping with the job demands.

Relationship Building Among Colleagues

Understanding that relationships with leadership may play a large role in teacher retention, one of the other factors pertinent to persistence revolves around the working relationships of teachers and others within the profession. This job resource has also been known to breed employee satisfaction (Ansley et al., 2019). Heightened quality work experiences not only create a teaching staff that works cohesively and maintains positive relationships, but in doing so, these relationships contribute to a positive school climate (Thapa et al., 2013). Thus, when considering job resources, the social support that is established among colleagues is the most well-known situational variable that has been proposed as a potential buffer against job strain, which aligns perfectly with the JD-R framework (Bakker & Demerouti,

2007). Thus, workplace relationships are deemed to be an essential component of teacher persistence.

Climate & Culture

Additional information about improving retention efforts stems from teachers' desires for a steady, positive school climate and culture. If this desire is met, many other factors that appear to positively and negatively influence teacher retention rates may automatically be addressed. The climate and culture aspect, as mentioned above, also plays a huge part not only in teacher retention but also in student achievement as well. Research shows a strong correlation between teacher job satisfaction and academic success (Norton, 2015, p. 91). Thus, a positive school climate promotes learning (by students and faculty), academic achievement, school-wide success, and healthy development overall, which, in turn, promotes satisfaction among employees, students, and families of the school community. Not only is satisfaction heightened, but mutual trust, graduation rates, social-emotional health of teachers and students, and teacher retention also experience improvements (Norton, 2015, p. 91-93). Moreover, intentional practices such as providing teachers with necessary tools and materials, encouraging collaboration, celebrating achievements, consideration of teachers' strengths and interests, etc., create a feeling of respect and appreciation that helps form a climate and culture where teachers feel respected and valued (Norton, 2015). Thus, research suggests that teachers are more likely to persist in the field if the teachers believe one's self to be a part of a positive and helpful group.

External Factors

Governmental Influence

In addition to personal, job-related, and organizational factors, many of the impacts on the teaching profession also hinge on external factors that include changes passed down from

governing bodies. Policies enacted by federal, state, and local officials can impact teacher retention rates, as such policies can directly influence teachers' decisions to stay in their positions or seek employment elsewhere. Thus, as political shifts occur, shifts in teacher retention also change.

The level of political support for teachers also affects teachers' likelihood of remaining in their current roles. A National Center of Education Statistics study found that higher levels of per-pupil spending were associated with lower teacher turnover rates (Ingersoll and May 2011). Thus, political shifts in funding are a major external factor associated with teacher retention, seeing that such funding allows for greater resources and class size reduction, which correlates to better support for educators. Factors associated with political parties and political leaders also influence the aforementioned job-related factors about compensation and benefits packages, retirement packages, and health insurance offerings, which can potentially impact teacher retention, as previously mentioned.

In addition to funding, increased resources and approaches to offset the demand for high-stakes testing are external factors that can sway teacher retention. One approach of political leaders lends itself to a system of autonomy and decision-making power given to teachers instead of over-management in decision-making by governing bodies. By definition, autonomy centers around the "discretionary freedom to organize one's job" (Evers et al., 2017, p. 806). Such organization and decision-making include but are not limited to: The choice of classroom materials, determination of course content, preferred teaching methods, choice of assessment mediums, disciplinary input, and decision-making associated with homework and grading (Jerrim et al., 2023). Research conducted by the Learning Policy Institute following the 2022-2023 school year found that "teachers with greater levels of classroom autonomy were more

likely to report higher levels of job satisfaction" (Heubeck, 2023). Thus, it appears that external

job resources related to funding and autonomy can offset some of the demands and/or drawbacks

associated with the profession.

Community Perception of Teaching

A PDK International report published in 2022 showed record-breaking faith of

Americans when it came to the grading of community public schools, as 54% of the 1,000 adults

surveyed scored local schools as an A or B rating, an increase of 11% from 2018 (Mahnken,

2022). Additionally, statistics from a 2022 poll conducted by the National Institute on

Retirement Security (NIRS) show that 95% of Americans surveyed agree that public school

teachers are important to the community. Moreover, 89% of those surveyed believe teachers

deserve more respect and better wages (Doonan & Kenneally, 2022, p. 2). Specifically, 94% of

respondents said, "elected officials must ensure teacher and school personnel pension and

healthcare benefits are sufficiently funded" (Doonan & Kenneally, 2022, p. 2). Figure 2 below

shows in greater detail the survey findings of the importance of perceived job-related,

organizational, and external factors that could impact the persistence and retention of educators:

Figure 2

Avenues to Attract & Retain Teachers
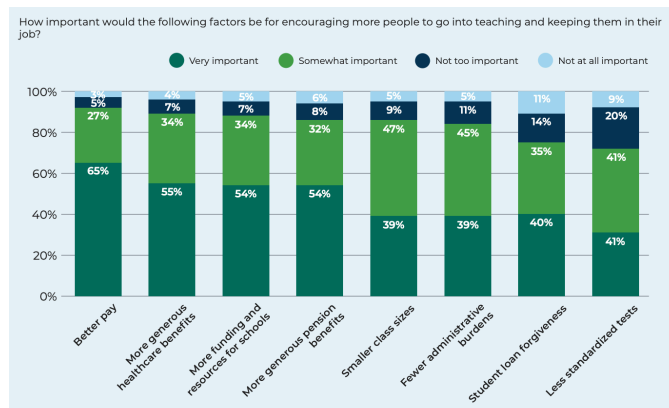
Looking across party lines, it appears that political parties also have similar opinions about retention efforts, with Democrats demonstrating a slightly larger belief in the job-related benefits offered to teachers (Figure 2).

Figure 3

Views Across Party Lines
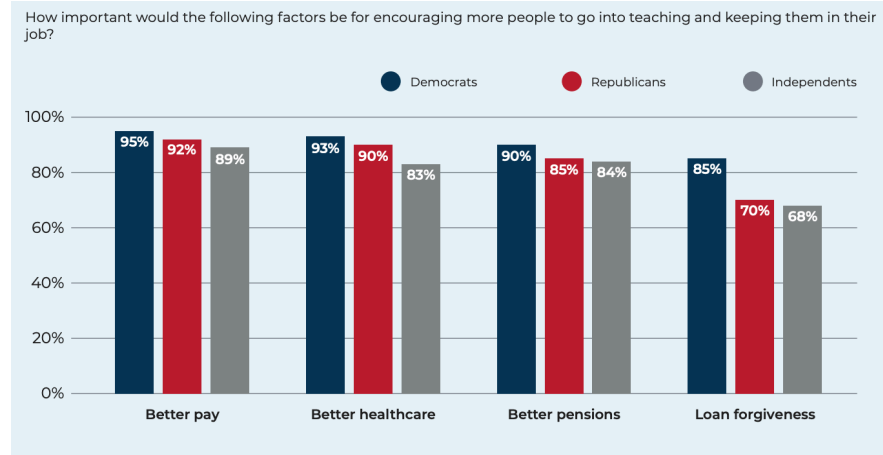
Surveys conducted in 2013 by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation found that 85% of teachers went into the field of education to impact and make a difference in students' lives, thus confirming that the profession of education is that of a social service which the community should value and appreciate (Bruno, 2018). Still, controversy looms around a perceived unappreciation of educators today, and further research is needed to attest to the feelings of those who matter most: The educators. Either way, societal support for education is a job resource that may be utilized to offset the daily demands teachers face.

Conclusion

In conclusion, teacher retention rates have dropped. When further researching teaching credentials and qualifications of currently employed personnel, one can see that the shortage is even more inflated than what meets the eye (García & Weiss, 2019). The literature surrounding retention and attrition can advance our understanding of some factors that drive retention,

providing a more comprehensive understanding of the perceived resources that influence teachers' ability and desire to persist. Knowing the determining factors that promote the greatest persistence among educators in rural Northeast Tennessee will assist surrounding districts in retaining teachers. Thus, educational leaders need to understand the aspects that promote teacher persistence in the Northeast region to see increased retention rates in the future.

According to research, persistence improves retention and success, making this study's implications even more beneficial (Wheatley, 2002). It has been proposed that job resources may buffer the impact of job demands on job strain, leading to greater persistence in one's occupation (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). As defined by The Collins dictionary, to persist means to continue steadfastly or firmly in some state, purpose, or course of action…especially despite opposition, and many in education can attest that opposition abounds (2023). Thus, research about teacher persistence refers to teachers' ability to remain in the profession, and as with any profession, longevity and the ability to persist are vital to the retention efforts of an organization.

In summation, further studies must be conducted to specify which perceived personal factors, job-related factors, organizational factors, and external factors serve as job resources that influence one's ability to persist, leading to greater retention of teachers. Changes leading to increased teacher turnover did not occur overnight, and changes to reverse these current trends will not happen overnight. The attrition problem is apparent; researchers have uncovered potential reasons and possible solutions. However, verifying and implementing the suggested changes is the next step in working toward improved retention rates for schools and districts.

Chapter 3

Research Methodology

Literature is abundant regarding an increase in teacher attrition rates. However, limited literature surrounding attrition and retention focuses on positive factors influencing educator persistence. Therefore, as researchers Merriam & Tisdell (2017) stressed, leaders must be interested in knowing more about their practice and improving their practice. A desire to learn more about one's profession leads to asking researchable questions of those who have persisted in gathering qualitative data to evaluate the current practices of local schools and districts. Identified applied research tactics will be used to further assist schools and districts in improving teacher retention rates.

Research Question

What are the most common personal, job-related, organizational, and external factors that have led teachers to remain in the profession? Which of these factors was most common among educators in the eight elementary schools studied in rural Northeast Tennessee?

What steps do persistent teachers recommend that school and district leaders take to improve teacher retention rates?

Research Design

A qualitative research method was utilized for this study. An interpretive perspective, as described by Merriam & Tisdell (2017), was taken as the researcher looked to differentiate which factors had the greatest impact on those who have remained in the profession. Interviews were conducted to "represent the multiple realities and interpretations" of the teaching experience (Merriam & Tisdell, 2017, p. 9). Responses from the interviews were then

transcribed and coded by the primary researcher and a secondary coder to identify agreed-upon themes and commonalities among participants.

Site Selection

Eight public elementary schools in rural Northeast Tennessee were chosen for this study. The eight schools chosen included one PreK through 4th-grade school, two PreK through 5th-grade schools, one PreK through 6th-grade school, three PreK through 8th-grade schools, and one K through 8th-grade school in a mostly rural school district spanning 348 square miles.

Table 1

Geographic Breakdown of Each School

School	Type	Region	Student Enrollment (Excluding PreK)	Number of Regular Classroom Teachers (K-5)	Teacher Retention Rates 2022-2023)
School 1	PreK-4th	Mid-Size Suburban	473	25	100%
School 2	PreK-5th	Mid-Size Suburban	168	10	100%
School 3	PreK-5th	Distant Rural	73	6	100%
School 4	PreK-6th	Distant Rural	250	12	100%
School 5	PreK-8th	Mid-Size Suburban	527	16	96%
School 6	K-8th	Mid-Size Suburban	517	21	93%
School 7	PreK-8th	Fringe Rural	183	6	93%
School 8	PreK-8th	Mid-Size Suburban	258	9	100%

Each school currently employs between thirteen and fifty teachers, making for very diverse faculty populations. Each school also had an average retention rate of 98% following the 2022-2023 school year, making this an ideal district to study as the majority of teachers seemed strongly about persisting in the field.

Participants in the Study

Permission was granted for the study from the Milligan University Institutional Review Board (IRB) and from Carter County School System administrators (see Appendix A). Educators at the eight sites were then surveyed to determine teachers' willingness and qualifying status to participate. The researcher needed to explore persistence beyond that cut-off point because 30% of educators leave the profession within the first five years (Kusy & O'Leary-Driscoll, 2020). Only teachers in kindergarten through fifth-grade classrooms were selected for participation to ensure continuity of grade bands and proper correlation among participants.

Role of the Researcher

When this research was conducted, the researcher was considered a partially active participant as the researcher was an educational leader at one of the schools included in the study. The researcher's role meant a vested interest was present. Interview questions were vetted to ensure participants' freedom in responses. One-on-one interviews were conducted with each participating teacher. Questions were semi-structured and open-ended to ensure that participants were free to share experiences pertinent to each one's involvement in the field of education. A secondary coder viewed transcripts to ensure that agreed-upon, content-specific themes were identified. Themes were then verified and prepped for sharing with the leaders of the district and each individual elementary school.

Data Collection Methods and Procedures

As Patton (1985) explained, "Qualitative research is an effort to understand situations in their uniqueness as part of a particular context and the interactions there. This understanding is an end in itself, so that is not attempting to predict what may happen in the future necessarily, but to understand the nature of that setting - what it means for participants to be in that setting, what their lives are like, what's going on for them, what their meanings are, what the world looks like in that particular setting - and in the analysis to be able to communicate that faithfully to others who are interested in that setting…The analysis strives for depth of understanding," (p. 1). Therefore, interviews with current educators were conducted to better understand the individual and shared experiences among those persisting in the field. Interviewing educators from various schools across the district was one way of assuring validity. Even though the researcher was a partially active participant with four years of leadership experience in one of the schools, those chosen for interviews were required to have more than five years of experience, assuring that all participants had worked for more than just the administrator conducting the research. This assured validity because organizational perspectives and experiences were drawn under varied leadership. Lastly, what is being studied through qualitative research is "people's constructions of reality - how they understand the world" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2017, p. 243). Investigating how different people have experienced the phenomena surrounding the profession of education brings researchers ever closer to reality as researchers have a greater ability to "uncover the complexity of human behaviors in a contextual framework, and to present a holistic interpretation of what is happening," in individuals' personal and professional lives about persistence in teaching (Merriam & Tisdell, 2017, p. 244).

Selection of Participants

An initial demographic email was sent to the faculties of the eight elementary schools. Faculty members were asked to identify their current role, years of experience, and interest in participating in research pertinent to teacher retention. Once responses were sorted by years of experience, willing participants were contacted, and individual interview sessions were scheduled, resulting in a voluntary response sampling method. Verbal and written consent were received, and on-site and virtual interviews were conducted. All interviews were recorded via Zoom and Otter, an artificial intelligence transcription software so that they could be transcribed, analyzed, and coded for accuracy by both the researcher, the participant, and the secondary coder. This helped to ensure that members were checking with each participant as well.

Implementation of the Study

Once a sample size of participants was gathered, an identical question set was used for each interview to assure consistency; however, each participant was free to express his or her unique experiences about the questions (See Appendix B). After each interview was completed, transcripts were sent to each participant individually to allow for member checking. Once all interviews were completed, the responses were openly coded and examined to identify selective themes pertinent to all participants, either as a whole or within a certain demographic. A secondary coder also examined the transcripts and reported commonalities among participants to assure the validity and reliability of the study and the interpretation of the findings.

Data Management

In-person and virtual interviews were conducted, and both were recorded using the Zoom app and the Otter app. Data was saved on the researcher's devices, which are password-protected. Responses were also stored in a shared Google Drive folder with the participants (individually) and the secondary coder. This sharing was implemented so that member checking

could occur. Participants did not have access to any other interviews besides the one in which they participated. The secondary coder was granted access to all interviews and transcripts. All electronic data gathered from this study will be securely locked and password protected. Handwritten notes or data gathered will be securely stored in a filing cabinet for five years following a successful defense of the research. All electronic and hand-written data will be destroyed after the five-year mark.

Data Analysis

Data gathered from the interviews was categorized using an open coding approach. According to Corbin & Strauss (2015), open coding involves inspecting responses to identify patterns and themes. Merriam & Tisdell (2017) depict qualitative research as the analysis of collected data as it pertains to the answering of research questions regarding how various people make sense of the world around them. Therefore, the primary and secondary coders set out to identify patterns within the data collected. The overarching themes and subthemes of this study can be found in Chapter Four.

Trustworthiness

The researcher, first and foremost, did, as Merriam & Tisdell (2017) suggest, by temporarily set aside one's own biases and assumptions to the best of one's ability to further ensure the ethical credibility of participants during the phenomenological interview process. Additionally, member checking played a large role in ensuring participants' perspectives were accurately depicted in the data and forthcoming findings. The researcher also utilized the work of a secondary coder. Subsequently, uninterrupted time was given to each participant to ensure an engaging interview composed of semi-structured and open-ended questions. Triangulation efforts were put in place to assure credibility and internal validity. The researcher collected

interview data from educators at eight different schools with varied perspectives based on job requirements, school demographics, and class configurations as previously mentioned (Merriam & Tisdell, 2017).

Ethical Considerations

A principlist approach to research was taken with this study as respect for participants' autonomy, beneficence, non-maleficence, and justice were considered. According to researcher Rose Wiles (2012), the principlist approach assures that consent to participate in research is freely given and that participants should not experience any form of coercion to encourage them to participate. Therefore, participants were utilized to make sense of the experiences and phenomena of teachers who have persisted in the field of education. In adhering to the principlist approach, the researcher took the following steps to protect the rights of the participants and to ensure that information was freely given:

1. The primary researcher invited each participant.

2. The objective of the study was made clear to each participant.

3. Participants were asked to provide verbal and written consent to the voluntary study. Appendix C of this study contains a copy of the blank consent form.

4. Participants were informed that member checking would be offered to assure the accuracy of perspectives gathered throughout the qualitative research process. Participants were also allowed to withdraw from the study at any time.

5. Secure handling and protection of data gathered were ensured through digital password protection, and the safekeeping of written documentation was ensured as hardcopies of information were properly stored in a locked filing cabinet available only to the researcher.

Chapter 4

Data Analysis and Findings: Interview Analysis

For this qualitative study, the researcher posed questions to those who have persisted beyond the five-year mark in the field of education to understand better the personal, job-related, organizational, and external factors that influence persistence and retention among teachers in a selected public school district in Northeast Tennessee. A sampling of participants was gathered based on voluntary responses from K-5 classroom teachers of the eight elementary schools within the district. Equal opportunity was given to each school and qualifying participants seeing that emails were sent to each elementary school faculty. Qualitative data was acquired from ten teachers, including a minimum of one per demographic location, to garner viewpoints from all areas of the district. Individual interviews included semi-structured and open-ended questions, allowing each educator to accurately depict his/her experiences throughout his/her career. Interviews typically ranged from 13 to 33 minutes, averaging 21 minutes. Participant demographics and current teaching assignments can be found below.

Table 2

Participant Demographics

Participant	Current Teaching Assignment	Years of Experience
Teacher 1	5th Grade (ELA, Social Studies)	8
Teacher 2	3rd & 4th Grades (Math)	17
Teacher 3	3rd & 4th Grades (Math, Science)	32
Teacher 4	5th & 6th Grades (Social Studies)	23
Teacher 5	5th & 6th Grades (ELA)	10
Teacher 6	3rd & 4th Grades (Science, Social Studies)	28
Teacher 7	Kindergarten (Self-Contained)	16
Teacher 8	2nd (Self-Contained)	22
Teacher 9	3rd Grade (ELA, Science)	13
Teacher 10	2nd Grade (Self-Contained)	30

Each interview consisted of the same eight questions and answered the following research questions:

Research Question 1: What are the personal experiences of teachers who have remained in teaching positions?

Research Question 2: What job-related experiences have contributed to staying in the profession?

Research Question 3: What organizational experiences have contributed to staying in the profession?

Research Question 4: What external factors have contributed to staying in the profession?

Research Question 5: What steps do veteran teachers recommend that school and district leaders take to improve teacher retention rates?

Each interview began with the researcher explaining the purpose of the investigative study. Ultimately, participants were interviewed to uncover what job resources and/or factors teachers valued most in correlation to overcoming the demands of the teaching profession.

Participants in the study were first asked to disclose their years of service in the field, their current role in education, and the initial factors that influenced their decision to become a teacher. From there, the researcher defined personal factors, job-related factors, organizational factors, and external factors as each relates to the literature provided within this study, and participants provided feedback, personal experiences, and opinions related to each category and the role each has played in his/her decision to persist within the field of education. After each interview, transcripts were sent to individual participants for member checking. The participants made no revisions. .

Discussion of Qualitative Findings - Interview Results

Utilizing John Cresswell's six-step method to analyze qualitative data properly, the interviews were conducted, transcribed, annotated, and labeled by primary and secondary coders to identify categories that could be placed under overarching themes made apparent to the primary researcher and the secondary coder (2013). Open coding was first utilized, followed by axial and selective coding, as the selection of core themes was identified based on recurring factors mentioned by most participants. Data saturation was evident as four distinct themes were easily identified based on repeated responses to the research questions presented to each candidate. Specifically, in response to question number five (rank the categorical factors in order of greatest influence on your decision to persist in education), eight out of ten participants ranked personal factors as having the greatest impact on their decision to remain in the field. In contrast, ninety percent ranked job-related factors as his or her first or second choice. This information alone signified and validated the themes that were most prevalent across the group of educators chosen for this study, and summatively, those themes were labeled as follows: (1) Opportunities to influence others, (2) Relationships, (3) Schedule, and (4) Collaborative nature of the work.

Opportunities to Influence Others

When asked to recall the greatest influence on teachers' ability to persist in the field, eighty percent of teachers stated that personal factors drove their persistence. Specifically, six teachers alluded to their continual desire to make a difference in the lives of others. Four teachers mentioned a sense of fulfillment from watching students grow and reach their potential. Teacher 1 stated that she "separates things in her mind" to prioritize the ability to impact others as most important whenever demands, specifically negative social perceptions of the teaching profession, rise to the surface. Teacher 4 reflected on her experiences and, in summary, simply said, "I know that I've made a difference." Referring to the teaching profession, Teacher 6 alluded that making a difference is "one of the big things that keeps me in it."

When asked about job-related factors, Teacher 5 mentioned how she liked being able to "see my students' feat of progress and see how the instruction (she prepared) is making a difference."   Additionally, teacher 5 stated, "You do it because you love kids and love people and you really want to make a difference in the world. I think that is why I have just ignored some of the negative external factors." Teacher 8, in response to job-related factors, like teacher 5, also stated, "I like it when you see the kids get it and make progress." Teacher 10 echoed these sentiments: "It's just rewarding to see when they (students) are learning something." Seven out of ten teachers who mentioned impacting others, making a difference, and seeing kids grow/make progress/reach their goals shaped the first theme of opportunities to influence others.

Table 3

Importance of Influencing Others

Participant	Impact On Others' Lives	Make a Difference	Student Growth
Teacher 1			x

Teacher 2	x	x	
Teacher 3	x		
Teacher 4	x	x	
Teacher 5		x	x
Teacher 6		x	
Teacher 7			
Teacher 8		x	x
Teacher 9			
Teacher 10		x	x

Relationships

In every interview, teachers mentioned the word relationship when discussing factors (resources) that have led them to persist in education. Two teachers (1, 8) mentioned the lasting relationships created with students and families, while eight teachers (1,2,4,6,7,8,9,10) mentioned the importance of relationships with colleagues. Additionally, eight participants (2,3,4,5,7,8,9,10) alluded to the impact of supportive relationships with administrators. Teacher 1 summarized relationships as one of her biggest factors: "It really goes back to just those relationships that you formed with kids." Teacher 8 mentioned the lasting friendships she has made with students and parents of students in reflecting on the psychological resources that have sustained her.

Many interviewed mentioned the family-like atmosphere regarding the importance of relationships and social interactions with co-workers. Teacher 2, in particular, revealed her decision to take a sabbatical from the profession a few years back due to a family issue; however, one of her biggest influences in returning revolved around her teacher friends and the "little

family" she and her coworkers had formed. Teacher 4 also disclosed a short-term leave of absence that she chose to take after her sixth year of teaching due to her mother's passing. This participant, who now has twenty-three years of teaching experience, said that returning to teaching was "part of my plan the whole time. I always knew that I would come back." Additionally, Teacher 4 stated that her first six years of teaching were conducted in a small Christian school, where she was the only teacher for several years. This experience left her lonely and longing for relationships and opportunities to collaborate. She now states that for the last seventeen years, she has been able to do just that within the profession, and it has allowed her to "have good friends and make good friends, and I enjoy that." Teacher 6 mentioned how she has always "clicked with the staff," and Teacher 7 mentioned "great people we work with…and a family atmosphere." Teacher 8 continually referred to the family environment, saying, "That's a huge factor as to why we stay, I think." Teacher 8 mentioned her colleagues and "the people I work with" five times throughout her interview, showing the importance of such a resource in her decision to persist. Teacher 9 mentioned how she loves to "geek out" with her coworkers, and Teacher 10 stated, "My coworkers are like a family….just a big family." Overall, eight of the ten teachers interviewed mentioned relationships with co-workers and the positive influence thereof.

In looking further at relationships with administration, teachers 2,3,4,5,7, and 8 alluded to the positive resources that administrators can and have provided for each of them. Teacher 2 mentioned her strong relationship with the administration as one of the reasons she returned from her sabbatical, saying, "We had a very good rapport, so I think that plays a huge role in me staying (returning)." Teacher 3 made it a point to mention the "excellent principals who have tried to back us with anything." Teacher 4 felt her administration had always treated her well but

could not say the same for others. She referenced how this could be a job demand that may cause people to leave teaching. Still, in her experience, Teacher 4 referenced a time in her life when her principal and superintendent both reached out to offer support and encouragement when her husband was diagnosed with cancer. Specifically, the administration at her school asked what he could do to make her year go as smoothly as possible. "To me, connections like that are huge, and they mean so much." Teacher 8 shared a similar experience saying, "We have had a lot happen in my personal life, and people have been there for me." She also mentioned how understanding and wise her administration was in deciding on her teaching assignment during her mother's passing. "I taught virtually, and even though I cried, it ended up being a blessing in disguise." Teacher 5 stated, "The administrative support I have received throughout the years has been astronomical." She also mentioned the encouragement she has received from the administration regarding her desire for capacity-building and future aspirations associated with leadership roles in her career. Teacher 7, when asked about any specific organizational factors that have positively influenced her to remain in the field, immediately said, "Having a great administration is always a plus. If you do not have a good administration, who wants to be there?" Following this comment, she mentioned having great people to work with and support you and how that points to a positive climate. All-in-all, relationships, in some capacity or another, proved to be a common theme among those interviewed.

Table 4

Relationships

Participant	With Students	With Co-Workers	With Administration
Teacher 1	x	x	
Teacher 2		x	x

Teacher 3		x	x
Teacher 4		x	x
Teacher 5		x	x
Teacher 6		x	
Teacher 7		x	x
Teacher 8	x	x	x
Teacher 9		x	
Teacher 10		x	

Schedule

According to the participants of this study, a third and highly prominent factor of importance among those who have persisted in education revolves around scheduling. Moreover, the secondary themes pertinent to this topic point back to an appreciation for the yearly working calendar, contract hours, built-in time off, and flexibility and how each category affects family time and parenting of teachers' school-age children. Seven of the ten teachers interviewed specifically mentioned the schedule as a benefit to his/her parenting. In contrast, at least two others mentioned the perks associated with time off and the ability to leave the workplace earlier in the day than most other professions, making contract hours an appealing factor in retention. Two additional teachers mentioned that the stability associated with the work schedule during school day hours has remained consistent. Flexibility and the opportunity to use a substitute were also mentioned as a job-related perk under scheduling.

Teacher 1, when asked about job-related factors that have influenced persistence, shared that she and her husband are both teachers (as did Teachers 3, 7, and 10). Specifically, Teacher 1 stated, "You could not ask for a better situation where everybody (in our household) is on the

same schedule." In correlation with the stability aspect of a teacher's schedule, Teacher 1 stated, "We all kind of know what to expect, and we get to enjoy our free time together." Teacher 2 backed up these sentiments by stating, "It is very nice to have a schedule that you can count on that matches pretty much what your kid's is going to be. I think that is huge." Furthermore, Teacher 2 stated that she appreciates predictability and the fact that the teaching profession offers just that. "I think that it (the teaching profession) offers something that is dependable and is not going to change, and the days off, generally, are the same times off as my kids." Specifically, Teacher 2 was one of the two participants, along with Teacher 7, who voted these job-related factors (stability/predictability, tenure, schedule with family, and benefits) as the number one reason for persisting in education.

Teacher 4 reiterated the sentiments of the others in stating, "I love the schedule of being on the same schedule as my kids and being able to be off in the summer." Moreover, she expressed the importance of time over money by saying, "I know I could make way more money doing something year-round, but being able to be on their (her daughters') schedule was just great for me." Later in the interview, Teacher 4 also mentioned a love for snow days and safety in bad weather for her and her children.

Teachers 5, 6, 7, and 8 echoed the benefit of a matching schedule with their children, with Teacher 7 driving home that summers and holidays off with her kids mean a lot to her. Moreover, knowing she is permitted to leave at 3:15 P.M. each day was also mentioned as a benefit of her personal experience. Teacher 2 appreciated this same aspect, stating, "I have to shut off at three o'clock," when referencing her desire to be a "present mom", something the teaching work-day allows her, and others, the opportunity to do.

Table 5

Schedule

Participant	Impact on Family	Time Off	Stability with Flexibility	Contract Hours
Teacher 1	x			
Teacher 2	x		x	x
Teacher 3				
Teacher 4	x	x		
Teacher 5	x			
Teacher 6	x			
Teacher 7	x	x		x
Teacher 8	x		x	
Teacher 9				
Teacher 10				

Note. Teacher 2 and Teacher 7 were the two teachers who voted job-related factors as the driving force behind their persistence. Table 5 clearly showcases their mention of scheduling in three ways.

Collaborative Nature of the Profession

The fourth overarching theme that surfaced amongst most teachers interviewed was another job-related factor of the profession. Collaboration is known as the act of working with others for a common goal, and over half of the participants in this study mentioned their appreciation for such opportunities within the field of education. Teacher 1, when discussing collaboration efforts, also mentioned how this aspect of the job relates to an earlier theme: Relationships. "It is huge to have that (collaboration) throughout the county and build those relationships and share those experiences with each other." Others, such as Teacher 4, responded by saying, "I love the collaboration part," when asked what job resources played a

positive role in allowing them to overcome the demands of teaching. "I love being able to ask someone if I need help on a lesson or something. That's just a big part of it (persisting)." Moreover, Teacher 4 reflected, once again, to her days in a one-teacher private school as she expressed her appreciation for collaboration in public schools and within the school and district of which she is a part.

Teacher 5 not only mentioned her appreciation for collaboration but also expressed enjoyment in the goal-setting and achievement aspect that comes from collaborative efforts. Collaborative mentorship opportunities were also a part of Teacher 5's experience(s) within the profession, and her remembrance of those set precedence, stating how such collaboration "kept me in the profession."

Teacher 6 not only mentioned her love for encouraging her colleagues by sharing ideas, but she also mentioned in two different parts of the interview how much she loves the continual learning aspect of teaching. Teacher 9 reciprocated these feelings by saying, "I really enjoy the teacher inservices and stuff like that. I love the trainings, getting together with other teachers, and hearing what they do." Additionally, this particular teacher provided reference to the numerous times she had changed grade levels, content, etc., and how her enthusiasm for continual learning and collaboration were resources that helped her overcome the demands of starting over.

Summary

In aiming to uncover what personal, job-related, organizational, and external experiences and factors have influenced teachers to persist in education, it appears that personal fulfillment accompanied by the ability to impact others, relationships fostered with adults and students, scheduling, and a collaborative working environment share a common value, each possessing its

drawing power. In addition to these commonalities, teachers mentioned their personality traits (positivity, resiliency, loyalty, energy levels, creativity, and leadership capabilities), community support (although felt to waver at times), tenure, benefits, and state retirement.

Additionally, three teachers mentioned generational influence as a reason for entering the field, but none of the teachers interviewed alluded to that as a reason for persistence. Eight out of the ten teachers interviewed felt that external factors and governmental influences posed more of a demand on the profession than a helpful resource, placing it last on the list of potential positive influences. Five of the eight could not provide a positive external factor, and each of those five made similar statements:

Teacher 2: "I think that (external) is the most difficult one."

Teacher 3: "I kind of had trouble with that," about coming up with any external factors that have influenced her persistence in the field.

Teacher 5: "I feel like some of the external factors we have are kind of negative toward teachers, so I do not know if there are any external factors that have kept me in education. Many of them have made me want to get out."

Teacher 6: "I feel like external factors would make me leave."

Teacher 7: "That is the one (external) that I have trouble with."

Overall, this study presents not only the researcher but others with a vested interest and insight into possible resources (whether personal or professional) that teachers must be offered and/or possess individually if the problem of teacher turnover is to shift.
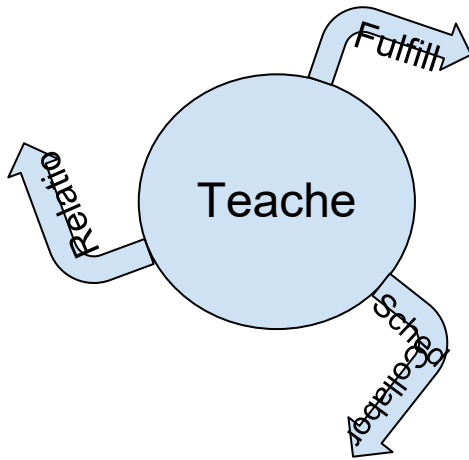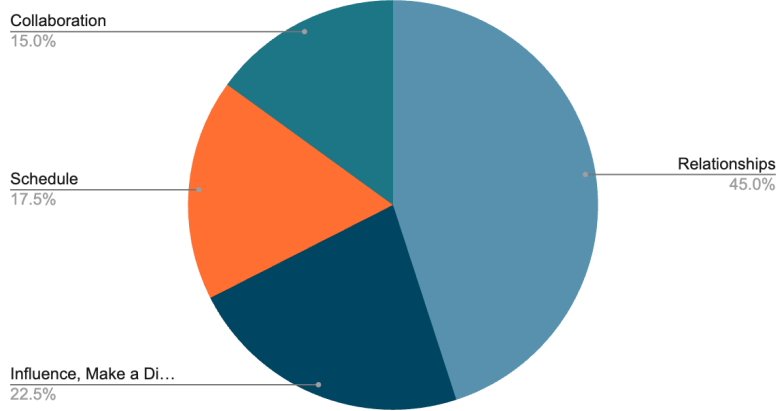
Figure 4

Graphic Conclusion

Figure 5

Weight of Most Common Themes/Most Mentioned

Weight of Themes

Collaboration
15.0%

Schedule
17.5%

Relationships
45.0%

Influence, Make a Di…
22.5%

Chapter 5

Summary of Findings, Discussions, Limitations, Recommendations, and Conclusions

In the words of Malekah Salim-Morgan, Deputy Assistant Superintendent of School Improvement, Louisiana Department of Education, "It is very important that we show others through our words and actions how necessary teachers are" (Barnett, 2023). That statement summarizes the value we must place on educators concerning the outlook of each one's ability to overcome the demands of such an important profession. Moreover, leaders like Salim-Morgan understand the importance of words, actions, and resources most desired by teachers. Seeing that a greater appreciation for those in education was a repeated finding amongst interviews conducted with a representative body of elementary school teachers in a rural school district in Northeast Tennessee, this study demonstrated the care and concern of educational leaders by uncovering and promoting said findings to better support educators with needed resources to, in turn, offset the demands of the job and improve teacher retention.

In conducting qualitative research to discover the resources most important for persistence in education, the researcher examined the personal accounts and experiences of ten

teachers in kindergarten through 5th grade with at least five years of longevity in the field. From these interviews and the analysis thereof, results suggest a significant connection to the following themes: (1) personal fulfillment garnered from impacting others, (2) relationships formed with various individuals, (3) the importance of scheduling, and (4) the impact of collaboration opportunities, each of which plays an important role as a valuable resource needed for teachers to overcome the demands of the profession. As depicted in the Job Demands-Resources model set forth by Arnold Bakker and Evangelia Demerouti in 2006, the demands of any job can lead to greater strain on an individual's ability to persist. However, when sufficient resources are provided, lower strain, accompanied by increased motivation, will surface. Thus, the JD-R framework concludes that the aforementioned themes are the resources found to be most valuable to the educators in this particular study.

Summary of the Findings

Through the interview process, the researcher identified themes that most contributed to teachers' willingness to remain in the field. The most commonly referenced theme, playing the biggest role in teachers' professional experience, was relationships and social interaction with colleagues. Of the four aforementioned themes, discussion surrounding the importance of relationships as they correspond to persistence surfaced 45% of the time, followed by fulfillment in impacting students (23%), convenient scheduling (18%), and collaboration (15%). Years of experience, demographics within the district, and the size of the school in which employed had no apparent bearing on responses. District climate and culture did seem to share a common bearing on the findings, as all candidate responses pointed to satisfaction and appreciation for the district makeup, making this study valuable to other districts that may be struggling with retention and feelings of satisfaction among educators. Career choice patterns surfaced as four

out of ten candidates expressed that their spouses were also in the education profession. An even greater number of participants (60%) stated that close family members were former teachers, impacting their decision to join the profession. Therefore, based on this additional finding, one can conclude that generational influences can and have persuaded individuals to pursue a career in education.

<div align="center">

Discussions of Findings

</div>

Seeing how the resources most important to educators tie together to increase teacher retention is the most valuable insight gathered from the findings of this study. Moreover, knowing that educators feel motivated when opportunities to make a difference are present, there is a strong, underlying connection between intentionality as it relates to collaboration efforts and the part such efforts play in initiating and building relationships among colleagues. Additionally, scheduling practices factor into the mix in that, if done purposefully, daily class schedules can further promote collaboration and the building of strong bonds between educators, resulting in greater outcomes for students, which provides a full-circle experience, allowing educators a greater chance to impact the lives of those whom teachers serve. Thus, it is important to consider categorical factors to persistence separately while also seeing the connections between each factor more holistically, as the four themes are interconnected in several ways.

Themes Related to Personal Factors

While research questions utilized in this study explored, in isolation, what common personal factors, job-related factors, organizational factors, and external factors influenced educators to remain in teaching positions, it became clear that each category of factors works together to foster just the right experiences needed for persistence. While personality traits specific to each participant were mentioned as personal factors, the driving force over which

leaders have influence pointed back to the motivation garnered through personal fulfillment experiences where true impact was evident in students' academic and non-academic lives. This particular category of influences (personal factors) was chosen as the most impactful resource by 80% of the educators interviewed in this particular study. Thus, the researcher and educational leaders can assume that a focus on increased difference-making opportunities in students' lives would result in increased self-efficacy, influencing persistence among educators. Therefore, efforts to acknowledge and set students and teachers up for success must be a top priority based on the perceived intrinsic motivation that fulfillment and feelings of impact have on teacher self-efficacy and persistence. This acknowledgment, according to participants of the study, can be more highly promoted through actions that showcase an interest in teachers' input when creating opportunities for success through scheduling discussions, class roster consideration, and curriculum choices, seeing that all of these factors play a role in creating opportunities for student success.

In conjunction with the suggestions mentioned above, additional ways to promote feelings of fulfillment and increased self-efficacy could include celebrations of growth and achievement for students, teachers, and the school. According to additional research, affirmation and recognition of teacher performance are additional supports shown to uplift educators and improve job satisfaction (Garcia and Weiss). If done properly, teachers will be frequently reminded of their impact, and a growth mindset will flood the school as all parties work to impact students in every way possible. Such acknowledgment of impact can be made known through teacher-of-the-month recognitions, individualized notes of gratitude from administrators and/or students, data conversations, etc.

In addition to constructing parameters and establishing practices suitable for success and the acknowledgment thereof, educational leaders may also wish to look at student-teacher mentor programs as a way of appealing to teachers' proven desire to impact the lives of others. This practice, referred to as relationship mapping by the Office of the State Superintendent of Education, is a best practice to connect one adult to every student in the school (*Relationship-building strategies for the classroom*, n.d.). As previously mentioned, teachers interviewed as part of this study generally felt as if the reward of making a difference with their students (personally and academically) was a job positive that assisted them in overcoming the demands of the profession. Therefore, educational leaders must work to create such opportunities. Focusing on professional development seminars related to adverse childhood experiences and non-cognitive skills as a means of offering teachers the knowledge base needed to mentor young adults throughout their educational journeys could be one way to foster these types of rewarding opportunities. Sample guides such as the one found in Appendix E could serve as a starting point for such practices. While this may initially seem like an additional obligation for teachers, it seems to be one, based on the research, that would be most valuable to continued fulfillment and persistence. That being said, other school and district-level initiatives may need to be examined by leaders to see if such requirements truly align with the job resources most educators mentioned in this study. All-in-all, impacting students' academic and non-academic success allows teachers to make a difference in their students' lives, improving teacher self-efficacy. Thus, educational leaders can utilize the aforementioned practices to promote such opportunities or further research ways to promote fulfillment in the workplace seeing that this personal factor strongly impacts educators' willingness to persist.

Gathering teacher input, acknowledging and celebrating success, and deliberate opportunities for student-teacher interaction not only assure opportunities for success; practices such as these also allow for the development and strengthening of relationships among colleagues and between educators and administrators, as well, which was a subsequent finding positively related to teacher persistence.

Themes Related to Job-Specific Factors

Research question two examined the job-related (large-scale look at the profession as a whole) experiences that have contributed to teachers' decisions to stay in the profession. Day-to-day scheduling and hours were resources teachers valued as both were said to impact the work/life balance of those interviewed positively. Moreover, the consistency of the yearly calendar and shared days off with family seemingly gave teachers a sense of satisfaction that has assisted in making persistence possible. Thus, educational leaders must form committees for teachers' voices in decision-making. Leaders must also consider matching local district calendars, as several participants mentioned this as a future consideration. Additionally, in allowing for teacher input on such tasks, teachers will be offered ways to impact further the lives of their own families, colleagues, and students, pointing back to one of the most important personal factors of teacher persistence. Additionally, forming committees also creates the opportunity for collaboration, which was also mentioned as a highly touted job-specific resource to the teaching profession.

Opportunities for collaboration were heavily weighted by the majority of the participants, as mention of sharing and receiving ideas within the school and across the district was referenced positively compared to perceived feelings of loneliness and isolation in other careers. The collaborative nature of the work coincides nicely with organizational factors surrounding the

importance of relationships, seeing that intentional collaboration efforts provide organic

opportunities for relationship building among colleagues, reiterating that the teaching structure

meets the needs of those who thrive on collaboration. Overall, according to Hattie (2010), not

only do teachers have a greater impact on their students' learning when they collaborate to

combine their expertise and improve collective efficacy, but they also obtain ongoing

professional development, encouragement, and support by moving away from working in

isolation to impactful teacher collaboration.

Themes Related to Organizational Factors

In conjunction with collaboration, social interactions and relationships between

colleagues at the organizational level seemingly influence persistence, as 80% of participants

referenced this particular category during his/her interview. Moreover, administrative care and

concern from district-level and school-level leaders, specifically during times of high demand (in

teachers' personal and professional lives), was viewed as the next greatest organizational

influence on persistence, with 70% of participants detailing experiences in their careers where

administrative relationships had positively impacted their careers. These experiences showcase

the need for educational leaders to foster a positive climate and culture within the organization so

that genuine relationships are built and nurtured with teachers, students, and families from the

top down so that resiliency can increase. As shown in former studies, resilient teachers are

known to build strong personal and working relationships with others, leading to persistent,

tenacious work; therefore, relationship building is not only preferred by the participants of this

particular study, but it is proven vital in fostering the resiliency needed to persist (Mansfield et

al., 2014)

When it comes to intentionally fostering these important collegial relationship opportunities for teachers, administrators can be more intentional in utilizing the advantages of a job-related collaborative working environment by creating and effectively utilizing professional learning communities (PLCs). If administrators make such collaboration a priority, then teachers will not only receive opportunities to join in decision-making as mentioned above; they will also receive support from fellow educators as they coplan, codevelop, and implement grade-level, content-specific, school-wide materials and assessments into their teaching. Additionally, such collaborative opportunities allow for the sharing and analyzing of student work to promote the formation of agreed-upon expectations. In conjunction with this approach, educational leaders can set up school-wide (or county-wide) virtual resource hubs for grade-level or content-specific teams to share copies of physical resources, formative assessments, exemplar video lessons, etc. Furthermore, dividing up planning responsibilities among team members during such collaboration efforts will also play a vital role in assuring that a well-balanced amount of time is spent on planning during the school day, eliminating the need for continual work after hours, seeing that data from this study alludes to the job-related factor of a balanced daily schedule as a job resource most important to educators. Such collaborative practices will provide both a physical and virtual space for collaboration and allow for flexibility in that colleagues can work on planning with their team at school and/or during a most convenient time with each one's lifestyle. In all, allocating specific time for peer-to-peer collaboration will protect planning time for teachers if utilized efficiently. Additionally, collaboration efforts associated with teaching can increase teachers' self-efficacy, as such efforts promote higher levels of openness and conscientiousness (Djigico et al., 2014). Overall, teachers will be offered a chance for organizational relationship building through collaboration efforts, and ideally, students will be

presented with higher-quality lessons, which can equate to greater success and growth for

students and increased fulfillment for educators, all factors from this study that seem to work

cohesively to increase persistence.

In addition to relationship building through collaboration, team-building exercises and

well-defined, highly-developed teacher mentorship programs are additional ways administrators

can continue to promote relationships as a resource for teachers. According to Norton (2015), a

strong mentor-and-mentee relationship enhances both parties as each individual learns more

about one's self, and improvements are made to each one's instructional practices due to this

symbiotic relationship. These suggestions were also reiterated by the participants of this

particular study as Teacher 5 exclaimed, "A great mentorship program would make a

difference." Additionally, Teacher 6 added, "It (a mentor program) needs to be very formal.

Teachers need to be paired up and meet regularly." Teacher 9 stated, "They (teachers) need

somebody they can trust and work with. They need a mentor or a group to which they feel

connected." Not only would such programs support the mentee, but certain teachers chosen as

mentors would be able to take advantage of leadership opportunities, and an increase in such

opportunities was a recommendation given by several participants following this study of

retention. Suggested release time for professional development and feedback by and with

mentors is also a strategy that more schools and districts should consider when developing a

mentor program (*Increasing Equitable Access to Excellent Educators,* 2017). These

relationship-building practices will, in turn, foster a positive climate and culture within the

schools and throughout the district. Thus, the social support that is fostered among colleagues

(whether through mentor programs, professional learning communities, etc.) seems to be one of

the most appreciated situational variables that have been proposed as a potential buffer against job strain as supported in the JD-R framework (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007).

Considering the additional relationships teachers develop (with students and families), this study reminds those in education of the importance of practices that foster and promote such bonds. Looking at the previously mentioned utilization of relationship mapping, it is clear that such adult-student mentorship programs provide increased opportunities for teacher impact and meet teachers' needs for strong relationships with students. In addition to this practice, educational leaders can promote such relationships by demonstrating the importance of these connections by greeting students by name, administering student and family surveys throughout the school year, and assuring equity in learning for all students. If leaders demonstrate such practices, then teachers will also grow to appreciate and divulge in such practices, thus increasing teacher-student relationships within their classrooms and throughout the school.

Themes Related to External Factors

Research question four asked participants to identify any external factors that contributed to staying in the profession, and the only real positive, albeit wavering, factor pertained to community support. Eight out of ten participants struggled to present positive external factors. This finding points to the assumption that external factors and influences pose more demands on those within the profession instead of providing supportive resources that could lead to greater persistence. Thus, educational leaders can utilize this finding by assuring that external factors, such as funding, testing demands, etc., do not become a stumbling block to the things that educators thrive on most: impacting others, building relationships with students, families, and colleagues, consistent yet flexible scheduling, and collaboration opportunities. In attempting to block out such demands, educational leaders must rely heavily on collaboration and teacher input

to meeting state requirements in a way that allows for creativity and autonomy. Additionally, leaders must find ways to minimize testing pressure and maximize teachers' and students' confidence while juggling mandates set forth by the state.

Additional Suggestions to Improve Retention

While much research was conducted to analyze the categorical resources most important to educators, participants were asked to provide any remaining suggestions for improved teacher retention. Three common suggestions emerged (all pertinent to external influences mentioned above): improved perception/value of/for teachers, increased autonomy, and decreased testing pressure. At least three participants mentioned each of these factors. Additionally, participants mentioned things such as student-driven decision-making practices, heightened support with discipline/behaviors, increased capacity building for leadership opportunities, and pay increases. Thus, additional research could be conducted to uncover ways such influences are being implemented in other districts.

Limitations of the Study

This study focused on and served to represent elementary school teachers in one school district in Northeast Tennessee. Limiting the study to one rural school district simply depicts these findings as true for teachers in this area. A deeper look at districts of various sizes and locations could produce a variation in findings in contrast with those from the district of choice. Additionally, limiting the study to one grade band allowed for a focused data set; however, undisclosed personal hindrances and/or current extenuating circumstances could have impacted teacher responses at various points within the study. Data collection took place in January, during which many individuals were experiencing weather-related school closures, which could have impacted teacher responses and overall results. Focusing on teachers who had completed

more than five years in the profession also limited the findings. However, this cut-off measure was implemented due to the current research on attrition rates of those who do not persist to the five-year mark. Incorporating novice teachers into the sample may have produced additional themes concerning the job resources and factors needed to increase persistence beyond five years.

This study was conducted specifically around teacher persistence, ignoring the success rates of those who have persisted. Additional information could be collected with various parameters in place so that educational leaders could further examine what resources highly successful teachers have ranked important to their persistence (and success) in education.

Recommendations for Practice

Upon conclusion of the findings, several recommendations to increase teacher retention can be set forth by the researcher:

- Educational leaders establish routines and procedures to impact and promote student success. They ensure that decisions are made by always considering the most positive impact on students, as teachers thrive on the rewarding nature of the teaching profession.

- Educational leaders acknowledge and celebrate student, teacher, and school-wide success.

- Educational leaders create time and space (physically, virtually, or both) for collaborative planning and sharing of physical resources by establishing professional learning communities.

- Educational leaders develop and implement structured mentor programs (teacher-to-teacher and teacher-to-student).

- Educational leaders seek input from educators on decisions that impact student success and on yearly calendar considerations (especially considering the calenders of districts in close, geographic proximity) and daily scheduling practices.

- Educational leaders promote relationship-building to enhance the overall climate and culture of the organization.

- District-level leaders improve upon and extend their relational support in a way that more regularly assists teachers.

- School-level and district-level leaders minimize testing pressure and interruptions due to testing by turning these hindrances into motivational opportunities to encourage and provide constructive feedback.

Based on data analysis and synthesis from responses, the researcher can conclude that efforts to promote a genuine value of the teaching profession are of great importance to educators, thus, the considerations mentioned above are highly recommended if a future increase in retention rates is to be observed.

Recommendations for Future Research

The focused research yielded specific themes related to resources most important to overcoming the demands of the teaching profession; however, expanding the study to other grade bands, special area teachers, special education personnel, and additional school districts would broaden the scope of possible experiences and influences on persistence. A broader scope of interest would allow educational leaders to differentiate to meet the needs of all faculties. Extending the research to other districts in the region and beyond would also help leaders determine if the results of this particular study are representative of other populations or limited to select populations only. Additional variables, such as the success rate of persistent teachers,

could also be examined to assist districts in retaining teachers who demonstrate the highest quality work. Specific personality and temperament studies of persistent educators could be used as a quantitative measure to categorize personal traits that most lead to persistence. Levels of satisfaction among persistent teachers could also provide researchers and leaders with possible correlations that may impact retention.

Conclusion

This qualitative study aimed to investigate factors associated with persistence in education. Ten participants from eight elementary schools in one district in Northeast Tennessee represented the sample for this study. Voluntary response sampling was utilized when selecting participants, and saturation of themes was evident following the ten interviews conducted. Thus, the research concludes that elementary school teachers are more apt to persist in education when the following resources are present: opportunities to impact students' academic and nonacademic lives (fostering fulfillment), strong relationships with students, families, and fellow teachers, family-friendly scheduling (daily and year-long), and opportunities for collaboration. Realizing that all of the factors examined in this study (personal, job-related, organizational, external) may not initially point to factors educational leaders can control, the knowledge pertinent to such factors is something that leaders can use to their advantage when sorting applications, preparing questions for interviews, checking references, and supporting teachers in their everyday work. In conclusion, teacher persistence and retention may be improved when focused, intentional practices relevant to the job resources mentioned above are utilized to offset the job demands of the teaching profession.

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Appendix A

Milligan IRB Approval Letter

MILLIGAN
UNIVERSITY

Date: January 2, 2024

Principal Investigator: **Mandy Greer**, Graduate Students, Milligan University
From: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Milligan University
Project: *An Investigative Study Related to Teacher Retention and The Factors Associated with Persistence in the Field of Education*
IRB Tracking Number: **2023-26**
IRB Approval Number: **Exe2401022001**
Subject: **Declaration of Exemption**

The Milligan University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your research application and has determined that your proposed research is exempt from further review based on federal guidelines provided in 45 CFR 46.104(d)(2)(i) in that you have demonstrated your research to be:

*Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) **and** The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects cannot be readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subject.*

You are expected to conduct your research in accordance with the research plan that was presented for review. Substantive modifications to your research plan will require another formalized review of your plan by our office. Please remember that while we are not specifically reviewing your informed consent, all researchers should provide potential participants with an informed consent statement that includes all pertinent information.

Best wishes as you conduct your research! Please feel free to contact the IRB office by email should you have any questions; IRB@milligan.edu

On behalf of the IRB Committee,

David D Gibbons, Ph.D.
Chair, Institutional Review Board
Milligan University

Appendix B

Carter County School District Permission to Conduct Research

Dr. Brandon Carpenter, Director of Schools
Dr. Diana Bowers, Assistant Director of Schools

Milligan University Institutional Review Board

January 11, 2024

Dear Milligan IRB:

For the research below:
Principal Investigator: Mandy Greer, Graduate Students, Milligan University
From: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Milligan University
Project: An Investigative Study Related to Teacher Retention and The Factors Associated with
Persistence in the Field of Education
IRB Tracking Number: 2023-26
IRB Approval Number: Exe2401022001

On behalf of Carter County Schools, I am writing to grant permission for Amanda Greer, a graduate student at Milligan to conduct her research titled An Investigative Study Related to Teacher Retention and The Factors Associated with Persistence in the Field of Education. I understand that Amanda Greer will be interviewing elementary teachers with more than 5 years' experience. The data collected is part of the regular education program, and the participants will remain anonymous. We are happy to participate in this study and contribute to this vital research.

Regards,

Dr. Diana Bowers
Assistant Director of Schools

Appendix C

Example Participant Consent Form

MILLIGAN UNIVERSITY
Research Participant Informed Consent Form

Invitation to Participate

You are invited to participate in a Milligan University sponsored research study. This form is part of a process called "informed consent" to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether or not to participate.

This research study is recruiting teachers with more than five years of experience to participate in this study. The expected duration for participation is approximtaely one thirty minute interview session.

This study is being conducted by Mandy Greer (the Principal Investigator). The Principal Investigator is associated with Milligan as a doctoral student, pursuing more information pertinent to teacher retention.

Research Objective/Purpose:

The purpose of this research study is to investigate and study teacher retention and the factors associated with persistence in the field of educatoin.

Procedures:

The procedures used for this research study are described below.

One thirty minute interview session (conducted in-perosn or via zoom) - to be recorded via zoom either way as a means of transcribing the responses.

Additional Considerations:

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Participation in this study is voluntary. Any decision not to participate in this study will have no penalty or loss of benefits to which you would otherwise be entitled if you were not invited to participate. Additionally, you may discontinue participation in this study at any time, without penalty or loss of benefits to which you would otherwise be entitled if you were not invited to participate.
Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:

Risks: Participation in this research study involves the following risks or minimal risks.
Only risk will be the giving of time in order to respond to the questions presented by the researcher.

Benefits: Participation in this research study involves the following benefits or potential benefits. These benefits, however, are not guaranteed.
Common factors identified as positive enhancements as they pertains to teacher retention will be considered by the researcher and school district and may be utilized to improve teacher retention rates in the future. Otherwise, no physical or monetary benefits come from your participation in this study.

Compensation:

MILLIGAN UNIVERSITY
Research Participant Informed Consent Form

This research study:

☒ Does not involve any compensation.

☐ Does involve compensation as described below:

    Click or tap here to enter text.

Privacy:

By participating in this research study:

☒ Your personal identifying information will be **maintained confidentially** and will not be used in association with any other research project. Your study-related research data will be used and reported as an aggregate only and will not be individually identifiable.

☒ Your responses to the survey will be **completely anonymous** and no personal identifying information will be associated with your responses. Your survey responses will be used and reported as an aggregate only.

☒ Your responses to the survey/interview will be **maintained confidentially** as follows: Written responses will be kept safely, locked in the researcher's personal filing cabinet for up to give years. Digital responses or notes will be secured with password protection.

Research data for this study will be maintained securely by the Milligan Investigator (or Milligan designee) for a period of 3 years, at which time it will be securely discarded.

Secondary Research

(NOTE: Research conducted by Milligan Investigators typically does not involve future, secondary research initiatives.)

This research study:

☒ **Does not involve** storage or use of the research data (or specimens) for future, secondary research.

☐ **May involve** storage and/or use of the research data (or specimens) for future, secondary research.

- Your personal identifying information will be maintained as described in the "Privacy" section.
- Data/specimens will be stored and used within <#> years.
- The future, secondary research will be limited to <describe the type of research that is anticipated and permitted for this future, secondary research>.
- By initialing/dating in the space provided, you give broad consent to for the storage and/or future use of the studies research data and/or specimens: Initials:_____ Date:_____

Research Participant's Rights and Responsibilities

As a research participant the following rights and responsibilities apply:

- If applicable, significant new findings developed during the course of this research, which may relate to your willingness to continue participation in the study will be provided to you during the course of the study by the Principal Investigator.
- To withdrawal from the research study while it is still in-progress, contact the Principal Investigator to ensure orderly termination of your participation.
- For a summary of the findings or conclusions from this research study, you may contact the Principal Investigator.
- For questions about this research study, your rights and responsibilities, or a research-related injury, you may contact the Principal Investigator and/or Milligan's Institutional Review Board.

MILLIGAN UNIVERSITY
Research Participant Informed Consent Form

Contacts:

Principal Investigator:
Mandy Greer, Student
mngreer@my.milligan.edu
423-213-7969

Faculty Advisor:
Mark Dula, Associate Professor of
Education
MEDulla@milligan.edu
423-461-8746

Milligan Institutional Review Board:
IRB@Milligan.edu

Office of IRE:
IRE@milligan.edu
423-461-8414

Statement of Consent:

I have read and understand the Informed Consent information presented for participation in this research study.

☒ This study **does not** require written consent. As applicable to the study:
- By clicking the provided **link or "I consent" button**, I am 18 years or older and I agree to participate in this research study.
- By **replying "I consent" via email** to the Investigator, I am 18 years or older and I agree to participate in this research study.

☐ This study **requires** written consent. By **signing below**, I (or my minor child) agree to participate in this research study.

Participant's Name (Printed): _____
   Participant's Signature: _____   Date: _____

Parent/Guardian (Printed): _____
Parent/Guardian Signature: _____   Date: _____

Appendix D

Teacher Interview Questions

Qualitative Teacher Interview Questions

RESEARCHER: I am conducting an investigative study related to teacher retention and the factors associated with persistence in the field of education. My aims are as follows:

Aim 1: What are the personal experiences of teachers who have remained in teaching positions?

Aim 2: What are the job-related experiences that have contributed to staying in the profession?

Aim 3: What organizational experiences have contributed to staying in the profession?

Aim 4: What external factors have contributed to staying in the profession?

Aim 5: What steps do veteran teachers recommend that school and district leaders take to improve teacher retention rates?

DEMOGRAPHIC/BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

- How many years of experience do you have in teaching?

- What roles have you been a part of in your teaching career?

- How many/which schools have you worked in up to this point?

- Any previous occupations before teaching?

- Why did you initially decide to become a teacher?

QUESTIONS SPECIFIC TO THE RESEARCH:

1. For the purpose of this study, personal factors/influences are defined as the influences in one's personal life that have impacted one's decision to stay in the field of education. What personal factors/experiences would you say have led you to remain in the field of education?

2. Job-related factors, for the purpose of this study, are defined as influences associated with the teaching profession as a whole. What job-related factors pertinent to teaching have influenced you to remain in the field of education?

3. Organizational factors, for the sake of this study, are defined as influences of the specific organizations for which you have worked. What specific organizational factors can you think of that have influenced you to remain in the field of education?

4. In this study, external factors are defined as outside influences on the field of education. What external factors have influenced you to remain in the field of education?

5. Rank the following categories based on their impact on your decision to persist in education: personal factors, job-related factors, organizational factors, and external factors.

6. Which of those listed above (if any) would you say poses a negative influence on teaching? Why?

7. What advice would you give school/district leaders regarding practices and efforts to retain teachers?

Appendix E

Relationship Mapping Guide

Harvard Graduate School of Education

how-to guide to
relationship mapping

MAKING CARING COMMON PROJECT | **HARVARD GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION**

GRADES
K–12

IMPLEMENTED BY
School Administrators

TIME & RESOURCE INTENSITY
● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
low → high

CAPACITIES PROMOTED
Relationship-building; Student confidence; Shifting school norms

---

Objectives
- ❑ To identify students who do (or do not) have positive and stable relationships with adults in school.
- ❑ To connect at least one adult in school to every student who does not currently have a positive and trusting relationship with an adult.

Time Required
- ❑ 1 hour advance preparation for staff meeting
- ❑ 1.5 hour initial staff meeting
- ❑ Follow-up, as needed
- ❑ Varying times that school adults will dedicate to a student in need

Materials Required
- ❑ Faculty room or other meeting space large enough for a whole-staff meeting that is not accessible to students on the day of the meeting
- ❑ Bulletin board, white board, or posters with student names posted
- ❑ Rolls of colored dot stickers: red and yellow (or colored markers to draw dots)

Advance Preparation
- ❑ Inform staff of the purpose of the activity — via memo, email, or other communication — and what to expect.
- ❑ Schedule a time conducive to bringing all school staff together. If possible, require all adults in the school to attend – including teachers, counselors, coaches, support staff, and others.
- ❑ On the morning of the meeting, post the names of all students organized by grade-level and last name on the bulletin board or white boards in the meeting room. Ensure that the room is not accessible to students that day.
- ❑ Provide instructions in advance and post them in the meeting room. (See below).
- ❑ Provide rolls of yellow and red dots in the meeting room.

Other Considerations
- ❑ **Scheduling**. This activity is best scheduled in October (once staff have gotten to know students and their needs a little bit) and then again in March (in order to assess progress and make any adjustments before the end of the school year).
- ❑ **Scale**. In smaller schools, this activity may be conducted for all students at once. In larger schools, consider conducting Relationship Mapping in grade-level teams.

Implementation

STEP ONE: MAPPING (20 – 30 minutes)

Require all faculty and staff to stop by the meeting room in advance of the meeting in order to carefully consider their relationships with each student. Post the following directions near the chart of student names:

Please place a yellow dot to the left of the name of any student with whom you have a positive, trusting relationship and whom you believe would come to you if they had a personal problem.

Place a red dot to the right of the name of any student you believe may be at risk for academic, personal, or other reasons.

Pay particular attention to students you teach or work with, but look at the full list to identify any student with whom you may have developed relationships.

It is okay to place both red and yellow dots next to the same student's name.

CONSIDER THIS
Make sure that the staff has sufficient time to spend "mapping" in advance. This may mean spreading the mapping over several days or providing coverage for classroom teachers.

Here is an example of how to set up A Relationship Map. List all students. Have adults place stickers next to students with whom they have a positive relationship and who they believe may be "at risk" academically, personally, or socially.

CONSIDER THIS
If possible, take the map off the wall before the framing conversation. This way, staff can be fully focused during the conversation. Also, unveiling the map during the summary portion of the meeting can be very effective.

Positive Relationship?	Student Name	At risk?
●●●●●●	Michelle B.	
●	Mike S.	●●
	Jake Z.	●●●●●

STEP TWO: REFLECTIVE MEETING (60 – 75 minutes)

Framing (15 – 20 minutes):

Encourage each staff member to think of a positive relationship he or she had with a teacher or other school adult when he or she was a student. Ask them to spend two minutes writing down how this relationship affected them.

✓ Next, ask staff to think of a positive relationship they have had with a student. Ask them to spend two minutes writing down how they believe this relationship affected the student.

CONSIDER THIS
Another resource for framing would be research findings about why positive relationships are important for students and for schools. Look at the Making Caring Common website for examples.

✓ Ask for 2 – 3 volunteers to share first how they were affected by positive relationships in school:

- *Who were the relationships with? What made them meaningful?*

✓ Ask for another 2 – 3 volunteers to share how they believe students were affected by positive relationships with them:

- *Who were the students? How did the relationships form? What made them meaningful?*

CONSIDER THIS

Reviewing the map in silence is useful for people who are more internal processors, that is, people who want to think about what they want to say before they actually say it.

Reflections (20 minutes):

✓ If the map has not been on the walls during the framing, post it now. Ask staff to carefully look at the map. Ask them to review it in silence for 5 minutes, thinking about two things:

- *What interesting or surprising details do you notice?*

- *What questions or reflections does the map evoke?*

✓ Next, ask for 3 – 4 volunteers to share what they learned and what they wondered about.

CONSIDER THIS

Depending on the size of the school, you may decide to have staff reach out to students with only one yellow dot as well.

If there is time, the facilitator may want to ask staff to comment on their reasons for giving red dots to students as part of action planning: What risks did staff identify? What kinds of support would be most effective? This can help match the right supports to students in need.

Action Planning (20 minutes)

✓ The meeting facilitator (most likely the principal or assistant principal) can read aloud the names of those students who do not have any positive relationships with an adult (i.e. students who have no yellow dots). Ask staff volunteers to reach out to these students. Next to the names of their respective students, make a record on the Relationship Map of the staff member who volunteered. For those students in need who are not initially matched with a staff volunteer, the facilitator should assign a coupling based on matching interests, schedules, etc. Prompt staff to think about:

- *What possible factors contribute to some students having more yellow dots than others?*

- *What kinds of school-wide changes can be made to increase the number of yellow dots for students?*

✓ Next, the meeting facilitator can highlight students staff have identified as at-risk (i.e. students who have red dots). Even if these at-risk youth also have yellow dots, identify staff to connect with them. Prompt staff to think about:

- *What possible factors contribute to some students having more red   dots than others?*

- *What kinds of school-wide changes can be made to reduce the number of red dots for students?*

- *How can the staff work together to develop a climate that fosters meaningful connections among all students and staff?*

✓ For those students with a noticeably greater number of red dots and no yellow dots, it may be worthwhile to consider assigning them multiple mentoring adults.

✓ Refer to the Questions for Reflection at the end of this document as a guide to producing meaningful, reflective discussion.

Closing (5 minutes)

✓ Re-emphasize the benefits of this activity – that fostering positive relationships with caring adults is critical for students' academic, social, and emotional lives – and express appreciation for the commitment of staff to prioritize these relationships at this school. Make sure to sincerely thank the staff for their participation in the Relationship Mapping exercise and the conversation.

CONSIDER THIS
To assist with follow-up, mark a reminder on the school calendar for four weeks after the reflective meeting and then again four to five months after the initial reflective meeting. Do this immediately after the reflective meeting ends.

STEP THREE: FOLLOW-UP (30 – 60 minutes)

1st Follow-Up: Approximately four weeks after the first reflective meeting, reconvene all staff who committed to reach out to disconnected students (those who lacked yellow dots and those who had red dots). This will provide participating school staff with a supportive community with whom they may share the challenges and successes of connecting with students. During these conversations, facilitators should find out two things:

- *Was a connection made with each student?*

- *Did the student respond positively?*

CONSIDER THIS
In addition to these two formal follow-up activities, administrator should be mindful of conducting regular informal check-ins with staff and students.

If a connection has not been made, the group should discuss ways to overcome challenges and strategies for making connections with students. If a connection was made but the student did not respond positively, the facilitator and staff member – perhaps in conjunction with a school counselor – can discuss alternative strategies.

2nd Follow-Up: One to two months after the reflective meeting, the Relationship Mapping facilitator should again reconvene staff members who committed to reach out to students to determine if connections have been sustained and if progress has been made.

" While our school had traditionally really excelled in academics, the social and emotional life of the students had not been as big a priority. We'd heard about the idea of 'relationship mapping' and decided to give it a try. When we were done, there were definitely some students who had no dots, or very few dots, next to their name. Among those kids, we were all very surprised to find academically high-achieving students, as well as kids who were struggling socially. We made plans as a school to engage all the students who were disconnected from the adult community. In addition to making sure that their advisor reached out to pull the kids in, for each child we identified at least one other adult in the community, usually a teacher or a coach, who would take steps to build a sustained, meaningful relationship as well."

— Doug Neuman, School Counselor
Buckingham Browne and Nichols School
Cambridge, MA

ACTIVITY VARIATION FOR LARGE SCHOOLS

In schools that are very large or where there may be concerns about finding a confidential space to post student names, it may be desirable to do the mapping part of this activity through an online system. Here are some tips for doing this:Using a survey or online system to which all staff have access, list the names of all students organized by grade level and last name. Next to each name provide two check-boxes: One to indicate that the staff person logging in has a positive and trusting relationship with this student, another to indicate that the staff person believes this student may have significant personal, academic, or other risk factors.

❑ Have staff login securely to the survey or system and complete the survey prior to the Reflective Meeting.

❑ Assign an administrator, instructional technology staff member, or other staff member to review the results and flag those students who were identified as not having a positive relationship with any staff member as well as those identified as facing significant risks. Print out a list of these students and bring this list to the whole-staff Reflective Meeting.

❑ Follow instructions for Step Two: Reflective Meeting above.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

❑ We suggest using these questions throughout the process, but especially during the Reflective Meeting as the group is summarizing findings and making action steps:

❑ Which students or groups have the greatest number of yellow dots? That is, which students are most connected to adults? Why would this be?

❑ Which students or groups have the greatest number of red dots? That is, which students are most at risk? What are the likely reasons for this?

❑ What barriers are keeping the disconnected students from having positive relationships with adults? Consider structural barriers, staff-imposed barriers, student-imposed barriers. How could we overcome these barriers?

❑ Which adults are best positioned to reach out to disconnected students? Why?

❑ What strategies might be most helpful in reaching out to disconnected students? How can we individualize our efforts and tailor them to specific students?

❑ What challenges are we most likely to encounter in reaching out to disconnected students? How can we address them? Can we engage other students in the process?

❑ Beyond reaching out to specific students, what else can we do to change our school culture so that all students feel connected to adults in the future?

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

Given that adults' perceptions may not always align with students' perceptions, it may be useful to also have students identify the adults they feel connected with. You may choose to adapt the adult relationship mapping activity by listing all of the adults in school and have students turn in a notecard identifying the adults they feel connected to. Alternately, you could use an online or paper survey to poll students. Comparing student and adult perceptions may provide valuable information to ensure that all students feel connected to at least one adult at school.

The following resources provide additional information and suggestions for connecting to students:

Sears, N. Building Relationships with Students. *National Education Association*.
Retrieved from *www.nea.org/tools/29469.htm*

Swain, C. (2011). The care and support of teenagers. Education Leadership Online, 68.
Retrieved from *www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/jun11/vol68/num09/The-Care-and-Support-of-Teenagers.aspx*

Warshof, A., & Rappaport, N. (2013). Staying connected with troubled students. *Education Leadership*, 71(1).
Retrieved from *www.nancyrappaport.com/downloads/Educational%20Leadership%20-%20Staying%20Connected.pdf*

MAKING
CARING
COMMON
PROJECT

HARVARD

GRADUATE SCHOOL
OF EDUCATION

Appendix F

Deliverable for Future Professional Development

Teacher Retention & Persistence

Mandy Greer - Principal, Happy Valley Elementary School
Tentative Professional Development Deliverable

Overview for Leaders
Teacher Retention by the Numbers

30% ……………….26% vs. 54%...................55%

Job Demands-Resources Model
Your Best Guess/Hypothesis

The Job Demands-Resource Model examines how resources positively impact employee motivation and performance when weighed against job demands.

As leaders, chime in with your perceived list of most sought-after resources (according to teachers).

Findings - Research Shows That These Resources Breed Persistence

1) Opportunities to influence others
2) Relationships formed with students, colleagues, and administrators
3) Scheduling that allows for adequate work-life balance
4) Collaborative nature of the job

Next Steps - List Current Practices of Your School or District

Examine if/where each one falls in regard to the resources listed above. Consider eliminating those that do not fall in line with the teachers' MVP list. (Most Valuable for Persistence)

Recommendations for Practice	Best Practice Examples	Recommendations for Continued Study
Create opportunities for teachers to make a difference	Mentor Programs (Relationship Mapping) Adult-Student Gather teacher input on scheduling, curriculum choices, rosters, etc. Regularly celebrate achievements	Personality and temperament studies of educators Satisfaction rating of educators Disposition & success of students in the mentor program
Strive to be intentional with relationship-building and collaboration practices	Structured PLC Times Grade Level & Content Specific for Progression Collaborative Planning & Resource Sharing Hub = Co-planning, Development of materials/assessments, Analysis of student work Teacher Mentor Programs Culturally Responsive Teaching & Intentional Positive Classroom Practices Family & Student Surveys Team Teaching Opportunities	Success rates of teachers & students when such collaborative practices are a focus Family involvement rates
Schedule Building	Gather teacher input on daily and yearly schedules (school and district level) Attempt to match with districts in close proximity	Seek input from other districts pertaining to the importance of matching calendars. Brainstorm schedules with local districts
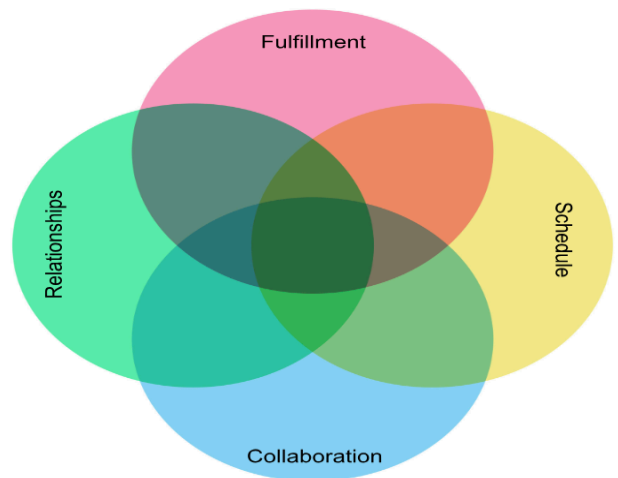
Appendix G

Dissertation Defense Approval Form

Milligan University Dissertation Defense Approval Form

Candidate Name: Mandy Greer

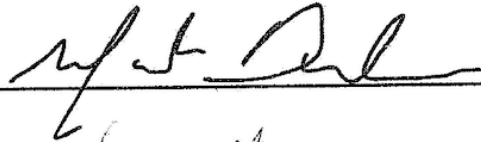Date of Defense: March 27, 2024

Dissertation Title: An Investigative Study Related to Teacher Retention and The Factors Associated with Persistence in the Field of Education

Final Approval of Dissertation Defense:

A signature below indicates committee members agree with the following:

1) Agreement that the dissertation meets with the committee's approval.
2) Agreement that the oral defense of the dissertation was successful.

Dissertation Chair Signature/Date: 4/22/2024
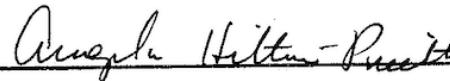
Committee Member Signature/Date: 4/23/2024

Committee Member Signature/Date: 4/22/2024
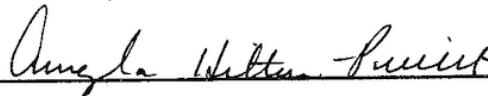
Research Director Signature/Date: 4/22/2024

Area Chair Signature/Date: 4/22/2024