

Teachers' Perception of Support from New-Teacher Induction Programs in Two Rural
Tennessee School Districts

By

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education

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2022

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Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore teachers' perceptions of the support they received while participating in a new teacher induction program. Two rural school systems were the subjects of the study; one from Middle Tennessee and one from East Tennessee. A variety of participants participated in the study with teaching experience ranging from 0-to 30 years, grade levels taught ranging from Kindergarten-grade 12, a variety of content areas, and ages ranging from 22-57. Responses were collected using focus group interview sessions and survey questionnaires. The analysis process included organizing data, reading data, coding data, describing themes, narrating themes, and interpreting results. The responses yielded three global themes: (a) support from mentors; (b) support from school-level administrators; and, (c) support from district-level administrators. Results from the study indicate teacher input concerning induction programs provide school systems with an opportunity to serve their new teachers at a higher level and may possibly allow for a reduction of teacher attrition. Future research is needed in other rural districts to determine if the participants' perceptions of this study are consistent with other rural systems. Moreover, due to the racial homogeneity of this study, further research is needed to determine the perceptions of new teacher induction programs from teachers of color.

Keywords: induction, leavers, mentor, movers, new teacher, non-renewal, stayers, support, teacher attrition

Dedication

I dedicate this work to my loving and supportive wife. Without your support, there is no way I would have completed the Ed.D. program and written this dissertation. I appreciate you always being my sounding board. You were so patient with me throughout the process. You indulged me each time I started a sentence with, “did you know...” None of this would have been possible without your love, assistance, and support. As I’ve said many times, “I like you and I love you.” And, thank you for marrying me!

To my children (including my daughter-in-law), I say thank you for being patient with me throughout my program. Thank you for helping out more around the house so I could do some school work. Thank you for asking about how school was going and listening as I gave you an answer that was far more in-depth than you intended with your query. I love each and every one of you. I look forward to seeing what God has in store for you. I could not be prouder to be your father.

To my parents, thank you for instilling in my brother and me the importance of education. While I did not share your love (or even like) of reading during my formative years, I watched as you set an example with your love of reading. I learned to love reading as an adult due largely to your influence when I was younger. Furthermore, thank you for spending countless tear-filled hours going over spelling words with me when I was learning to spell. I cannot overstate how helpful that has been in my life – especially during this program. I love you greatly.

Finally, to my mother-in-law, thank you for being so supportive of me and accepting me into your life. You are always so encouraging in all of my endeavors. Mostly, thank you for rearing such an amazing Christian daughter. I’m lucky to be a part of your family.

Acknowledgements

I want to thank each of the Milligan University faculty who all went above and beyond to help me out during my time in the Ed.D. program. In the classroom, I learned so much about educational leadership from Dr. David Timbs, Dr. Jackie Wolfe, Dr. Corey Gardenhour, Dr. Robbie Anderson, Dr. Nancy Miles, Dr. Jodee Dotson, and Dr. Josh Carter. You all helped shape the person I am now. Words do not properly represent how impactful you have been in my professional life.

I want to especially thank the fulltime faculty, Dr. Angela Hilton-Prillhart, Dr. Mark Dula, Dr. Tausha Clay, and Dr. Patrick Kariuki. Your support and encouragement throughout the program was invaluable and kept me going when I was ready to just walk away. Dr. HP and Dr. Dula, I want to single you out and thank you for meeting with me so many times to guide me in deciding on a topic and how to approach the study. The effects of your wisdom, care, and encouragement cannot be overstated.

Finally, I want to thank Cohort 4. You ladies simply rock. The seemingly endless group texts and discussions covering a myriad of topics could not have been more helpful. Mostly, though, you pushed me academically. I was not joking when I said I wanted to turn in work that was better than yours. You challenged me at every turn. I am grateful to have had the opportunity to work with you. I am a better person for knowing and working with you.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Pre-service teachers exit their educational programs filled with eager anticipation of changing the world one student at a time. As these future teachers know from their own experiences, teachers are essential (S.G. Rivkin et al., 2005). Hanushek & Rivkin (2007), Wayne & Young (2003), Wong (2004), and Zembytska (2016) support that statement by reporting that the quality of instruction is the top school-based influencer of student achievement. Furthermore, teachers clearly make a difference in student learning (Rivkin, Hanushek, & Kain, 2001; Sanders & Rivers, 1996; Wechsler et al., 2010). Research demonstrates the importance of having a quality teacher in the classroom, and these newly graduated teachers are ready to take on the challenges that lie ahead of them.

Research has also shown that teachers who are new to the profession are less effective in improving their students' learning than their experienced colleagues (Murnane & Phillips, 1981; Raymond, Fletcher, & Luque, 2001; Rivkin, Hanushek, & Kain, 2001). Fry and Anderson (2011) point out, "In an era of increased teacher accountability, new teachers are encountering unprecedented challenges" (p. 13). Unfortunately, "teachers encounter a steady stream of distinct challenges in their initial years in the classroom. Many struggle in isolation to navigate the steep learning curve characteristic of these early years" (Goldrick et al., 2012, para. 1). Even with these challenges and inexperience, it is important to note that the quality of teacher instruction increases with each subsequent year for a new teacher during the first five years in the classroom (Zembytska, 2016). Herein lies a significant problem for these new teachers entering the profession. "Even though the profession of teaching requires intensive interaction with children, the actual work of the teacher is mainly done in isolation from his/her colleagues"

(Ingersoll, 2012, p. 47). Too often, this isolation and other preventable issues result in teachers leaving the classroom before they become quality teachers and able to make that difference they so desperately wanted to make. New teachers become disillusioned and leave the classroom. The exodus of teachers is far worse than in most other professions. Ingersoll et al. (2018) revealed in their report, *Seven Trends: The Transformation of the Teaching Force – Updated October 2018*, “more than 44 percent of new teachers in public and private schools leave teaching within 5 years of entry” (p. 20). Angelle (2002) paints a grimmer picture of the massive new teacher exodus writing, “20-30% leave the field within the first three years, and after about five years, an estimated 50% of beginning teachers have left the profession entirely” (as cited in Cherian & Daniel, 2008, p. 1). These researchers further note that since the teacher workforce numbers have increased during the last few decades, that means there are more beginners currently in the teaching force with these new teachers likely to leave the profession’ (Ingersoll et al., 2018).

The question is why do teachers leave the profession? One of the main reasons given for leaving the teaching profession is the lack of support from school administration (Cherian & Daniels, 2008; Robertson, Hancock, & Anderson, 2006). Ingersoll et al. (2018) found in a 2012-2013 survey of teachers who left the profession and answered a survey, “the most frequently cited set of reasons [for leaving the teaching profession] concerned dissatisfaction with any of a variety of school and working conditions” (p. 21).

Losing teachers to turnover is far more than just an educational problem. It is also a monetary concern. Borman and Dowling (2008) noted that the cost of replacing lost teachers nationwide was “over \$2.2 billion per year” (p. 370). Looking at the monetary impact of teacher attrition more recently, the National Commission on Teaching & America’s Future found the cost due to turnover to be around \$7.3 billion per year (Spears, 2015).

The retention rate for teachers in Tennessee is no better. In Tennessee, 40% of all new teachers leave their school by year five (Collins & Schaaf, 2020). In 2017 the Tennessee Hope Street Group Fellows conducted a study across Tennessee at the behest of the Tennessee Department of Education. The study involved 68 in-person focus groups (367 teachers) and 1,262 teachers participating in a survey. The Fellows also found that only 49% of the teachers had been assigned a mentor when they started teaching (Hope Street Group, 2017).

Furthermore, the study discovered that of those assigned a mentor, 27% stated they did not engage in any activities with their mentor. One teacher spoke of the lack of support from his/her mentor, “I received almost no support from my appointed mentor. It was very disappointing” (Hope Street Group, pp. 12). It is worth noting that Tennessee is one of twelve states that does not require induction and mentoring support for new teachers (Evans, 2020).

Research has shown that the shortage of teachers in the classrooms is not a “supply” problem from the educator preparation programs across the nation. It appears there are plenty of graduates. Instead, the teacher shortage problem comes from the school systems’ inability to retain the new teachers to the profession (Boyd et al., 2006; Burke et al., 2015; Burke et al., 2013; Dupriez, Delvaux, & Lothaire, 2016; Ingersoll, 2001; Sass et al., 2012; White, Gorard, & See, 2006).

In order to address the issue of teacher attrition, school systems across the United States are adopting or have adopted new-teacher induction/mentor programs. These programs have demonstrated to be effective.

The analysis of research and numerous reports of national educational agencies and organizations (NCES, NCTAF, NEW, NTC, etc.) shows that among all the governmental initiatives to retain effective teachers in American public schools since 1980s up to the

present time (financial incentives for teachers, salary increases, standardization reform, alternative teacher certification, flexible licensure schemes, in-service teachers support, etc.), new teacher mentoring and induction have proven to be highly efficient and cost-effective (Zembytska, 2016, p. 69).

As evidence for the cost-effectiveness of new-teacher induction/mentoring programs, Villar and Strong (2007) found the “investment of an induction program in California after five years is as much as \$1.66 for every dollar spent” (p. 16). In addition to the monetary value of these types of programs in California, H.K. Wong (2004) pointed to evidence that new teacher attrition decreased when induction/mentoring programs were in place. While these are limited studies, they indicate that new-teacher induction/mentoring programs could not only improve educational outcomes and aid in retaining teachers but likely provide needed cost savings for systems across the United States.

Given the national retention rates of new teachers, the cost of replacing teachers, and lack of support as one of the significant reasons for teachers leaving the classroom, the problem addressed in this paper is how effectively are school districts meeting the needs of newly hired teachers.

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of the study was to investigate two new-teacher induction programs and how they were perceived by teachers in two select rural school districts in Tennessee. The selected school systems represent large and medium-sized rural counties in Tennessee, respectively (Tennessee Counties by Population, n.d.).

System A was a rural system located in the Middle Grand Division of Tennessee. It consists of seven schools (five Pre-K to 8th Grade schools, one Consolidated 9-12 High School,

one Virtual/Alternative School), 4,112 students, 237 classroom teachers, and has a 15:1 student:teacher ratio (Public School Review, 2021). No colleges or universities provide an educator preparation program within fifty miles of System A.

System B was a rural system located in the Eastern Grand Division of Tennessee. It consists of sixteen schools (two high schools, one grades 5-8 school, nine Pre-K-8 schools, one Pre-K-4 school, and one K-12 laboratory school), 8,479 total students, 554 classroom teachers, and has a 15:1 student:teacher ratio (Public School Review, 2021). Four universities provide educator preparation programs within fifty miles of System B.

System A hired 68 new teachers from 2018-2019 to 2020-2021 (twenty-two of these teachers were new to the profession). Of that 68 new hires, six teachers are no longer with the system. Five were nonrenewals, and one moved to another system voluntarily (R. Pryor, personal communications, April 27, 2021). Consequently, of the 68 new hires between the years 2018-2019 to 2020-2021, 8.8% left the district.

System B hired 235 new teachers between 2016-2017 and 2020-2021 (105 of those teachers were new to the teaching profession). Of that 235 new hires, 88 teachers are no longer with the system. Consequently, of the 235 new hires, 37.4% have left the district (C. Percell, personal communications, May 18, 2021).

The data presented only represented teachers who left the system . The statistics do not include teachers who transferred schools. Furthermore, the reasons for leaving have been the following reasons – family situations, non-rehires, changed systems, and left the profession (R. Pryor, personal communications, April 27, 2021; C. Percell, personal communications, May 18, 2021).

While research on teacher retention and new-teacher induction programs have been common for the last thirty years, little research exists on rural systems in the United States, much less on rural systems in Tennessee. The problem was that no research on the perceptions new teachers had of the new-teacher induction programs in the two subject systems had been conducted.

This research focused on two rural systems in the state of Tennessee. The study aimed to provide a qualitative description of the new-teacher programs for each system. The researcher surveyed and interviewed the teachers who participated in or are currently participating in the respective programs.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate two new-teacher induction programs and how the induction program might influence perceived support on teachers in select rural school districts in the state of Tennessee. Specifically, the study sought to capture the perceptions of the teacher who participated in their system's new-teacher induction program. The goal was to provide the teachers with a stage on which they could share their voice on how they felt the respective programs supported them and their teaching in the classroom.

Another purpose of the study was to provide the participating systems with valuable feedback on their new-teacher induction programs. This teacher feedback would allow the systems to assess any necessary program changes. More to the point, the qualitative data from this study provides each program's leaders the opportunity to make their programs more supportive for the new teachers and, more importantly, for the students in their schools.

The final purpose of the study was to provide rich qualitative data that cannot be produced from a data-driven quantitative approach. The interviews, focus groups, and surveys

provided many lived experiences from teachers new to the systems and new to teaching. The goal of this study was to use qualitative data to enhance the programs by recognizing the strengths and weaknesses of each program to serve new teachers in the future better and, ultimately, reduce the rate of teacher attrition.

Research Question

How do new teachers in two rural Tennessee school districts perceive support from participating in a new-teacher induction program?

Significance of the Study

In a broader sense, the study has the opportunity to provide support for research completed by Ingersoll and Smith (2004). The researchers found ten strong induction supports for new teachers in that study. The supports are (a) mentor from the same field, (b) mentor from another field, (c) beginners' seminars, (d) common planning time, (e) collaboration with others, (e) external teacher network, (f) supportive communication, (g) reduced schedule, (h) reduced preparations, and (i) teacher aide.

In the study mentioned above, the researchers determined that if a new-teacher induction program included “a mentor from the same field, common planning time with other teachers in the same subject, scheduled collaboration with other teachers, an external network of teachers” and the teacher “participated in a general induction program; a seminar for beginning teachers; and had regular or supportive communication with their principal” and “a reduced number of course preparations,” the odds of that teacher departing the school at the end of the first year “was less than half of those who participated in no induction activities” (Ingersoll & Smith, 2004, pp. 35-37).

Given the narrow nature of the study, the contributions of the research would mainly benefit the two rural Tennessee school districts involved in the study. The districts would be able to utilize the findings and recommendations in the study to make any necessary changes or to continue portions of their respective programs. However, the study could aid other school districts in implementing and improving their new teacher induction programs as the study provided rich data through teacher voice.

Definition of Terms

The following are the definitions of terms used in this study. The researcher defined the terms not cited below.

Induction: Induction is “the name given to a comprehensive, coherent, and sustained professional development process that is organized by a school district to train, support, and retain new teachers, which then seamlessly progresses them into a lifelong learning program” (Wong, 2005, p. 43). Ingersoll and Smith (2004) defined induction “as a bridge, enabling the ‘student of teaching’ to become a ‘teacher of students’” (p. 683).

Leavers: Leavers are teachers who have left the profession of education.

Mentor: A mentor is “a single person, whose basic function is to help a new teacher” (Wong, 2005, p. 43).

Movers: Movers are teachers who have changed schools from one year to the next.

New Teacher: New teacher is a teacher who is new to a school system and has worked for that system for less than five years.

Non-Renewal: Non-renewal is a teacher who was not rehired by his/her current school by the beginning of the next school year.

Stayers: Stayers are teachers who remain in the same school the next school year.

Support: Support is a combination of components to improve the likelihood of teacher success. Wiebke & Bardin (2009) define support as a combination of mentoring, common planning, professional development, and an external teacher support network. In addition, this study's researcher would include an emotional component from the school administrators as part of the definition of support.

Teacher Attrition: Teacher attrition is defined as teachers leaving the classroom (either changing schools, districts, or leaving the teaching profession entirely).

Limitations of the Study

The major limitation of the study was control over participation rates. The researcher had to rely on the willingness of the participants to complete the survey and participate in the interviews/focus groups. A further limitation arose in scheduling conflicts with the participants. Even if the participant was willing to participate in the study, circumstances interfered with their ability to participate.

Furthermore, due to the participants having scheduling conflicts from System A, two scheduled focus groups became an interview. The same issue occurred with System B for one of the scheduled focus groups.

Finally, System B would not provide the names of teachers who participated in their new-teacher induction program. The researcher had to rely on mass email distributions and personal contact to achieve an acceptable response rate from the participants.

Organization of the Study

Chapter One includes a brief introduction to the study, a statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, research question, significance of the study, list of definitions, limitations of the study, and organization of the study. Chapter Two provides a relevant literature review on

new teacher attrition and induction programs. Chapter Two includes five main sections: teacher attrition, reasons for teacher attrition, the impact of teacher attrition, the monetary cost of teacher attrition, and new-teacher induction. Chapter Three includes the qualitative procedures and methodology used to gather data for coding and analysis. Chapter Four provides an explanation of the data the researcher gathered. Chapter Five summarizes the findings, conclusions, discussion, recommendations, and suggestions for future research.

Chapter 2

Review of the Literature

This study aimed to investigate the perception of support from teachers who participated in a new teacher induction program in two rural Tennessee school districts. Given the narrow focus of this study, there was no available research on the two new teacher induction programs. Consequently, Chapter Two of this study investigates the literature relevant to the study's overall scope. Chapter Two is organized into five major sections: Teacher attrition, factors contributing to teacher attrition, the impact of teacher attrition, the monetary impact of teacher attrition, and new teacher induction.

Section One focuses on general teacher attrition, new teacher attrition, subject-specific teacher attrition, teacher attrition by race, rural teacher attrition, and attrition in Tennessee and the two school districts in the study. Section Two focuses on the available literature on the significant factors contributing to teacher attrition. Section Three focuses on how overall teacher attrition, new teacher attrition, and attrition in the Appalachian Mountain region affect education. Section Four discusses the literature on attrition's monetary impact on school districts and the nation. Finally, Section Five looks at the literature on what new teacher induction programs should include, how successful they are, and the steps systems should take to implement a successful new teacher induction program.

Teacher Attrition

Teacher attrition in the United States has become a severe challenge for school districts over the last three decades, and it appears to have no end in sight (Lowrey, 2012; Marinell & Coca, 2013; Shockley et al., 2013; Taylor, 2020). Even mainstream news outlets are beginning to take note of the issue. In 2018, the Wall Street Journal ran a headline that read, "Teachers Quit

Jobs at Highest Rate on Record.” The article pointed out that “in the first 10 months of 2018, public educators quit at an average rate of 83 per 10,000 a month, according to the Labor Department. [Which] is the highest rate for public educators since such records began in 2001” (Hackman & Morath, 2018, para. 4).

Teacher attrition contributed to ongoing issues with teacher shortages. Many researchers have found the teacher shortages to be more the result of school district’s inability to retain teachers rather than the number of graduates coming from education preparation programs (Boyd et al., 2006; Burke et al., 2015; Burke et al., 2013; Dupriez, Delvaux, & Lothaire, 2016; Ingersoll, 2001, 2002; Sass et al., 2012). The research is detailed, schools “are rapidly losing the newly hired teachers they already have. In other words, schools are leaky buckets losing existing teachers faster than they can take in new ones” (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2010, p. 7).

General teacher attrition rates vary depending on the year or the research. For example, the National Center for Education Statistics (2015) reported that teachers left the profession at an 8% rate from 2008-09 to 2012-13. Of the 8% that leave, only 38% left due to retirement. While the 8% attrition rate remained constant during those four years, the report noted that the attrition rate hovered around 6% in the late 1980s. More recently, data show the teacher turnover rate at about 16%. Of that number, only about 18% is due to retirement (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019). To further complicate the issue of attrition, “nearly every state [in the United States] is reporting shortages in certain subjects, and most are resorting to hiring teachers who are not fully certified for their teaching assignments” (Sutcher, Darling-Hammond, Carver-Thomas, 2019, p. 5).

While the general teacher attrition rate varies, a more accurate state of teacher attrition is found after disaggregation of the general data. The rate varies when looking at attrition based on

race, gender, school type, certification endorsement, region, state, pandemic effect, and, most importantly, age/years of experience.

Research has shown a correlation between race and teacher attrition. Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2017) and Ingersoll and May (2015) discovered that teachers of color have a much higher overall turnover rate than their white counterparts. The data from the last two decades show minority teachers are more likely to migrate from the classroom. “For instance, during the 12 months from the beginning of the 2003-04 school year to the following year, about one-third of the approximately 600,000 minority teachers in the nation moved into, between, or out of schools” (Ingersoll & May, 2015, p. 41). In most years, this exodus has shown to be especially true for black male teachers whose numbers in attrition are higher than all other racial/gender categories (Ingersoll & May, 2015). In 2019, Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond further noted that teachers of color transferred schools far more than their counterparts. The National Center for Education Statistics (2015) provided data on teacher attrition based on race. Among the teachers working in public schools in 2011-12, these are the percentage of teachers who left their school by the 2012-13 school year. 15% of all white teachers had either moved schools or left the profession (7% and 8% respectively). 22% of all black public school teachers had either moved schools or left the profession (12% and 10% respectively). Finally, 21% of all Hispanic teachers moved schools or left the profession (13% and 8% respectively).

It is important to note that these departure numbers can, partly, be attributed to the fact that minority teachers overwhelmingly teach in high-poverty schools with a high minority population. The research shows that teachers in high poverty high minority schools leave the profession or move schools at a higher rate regardless of race. There is no statistical difference of

leavers/movers among the races in these schools (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015; Sutchter et al., 2019). As a matter of fact, “the turnover rate in Title I schools is nearly 50% greater than that of non-Title I schools” (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019, p. 8). Furthermore, Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2017) found that “turnover rates are 70% higher for teachers in schools serving the largest concentrations of students of color” (p. v). Consequently, given that a large percentage of minority teachers end up placed in high minority schools and teachers in those high minority schools tend to leave at higher rates, it is not surprising that minority teacher attrition rates are higher than their white colleagues.

On a positive note, the data also show that while the percentage of minority teachers has not kept pace with the number of minority students, the number of minority teachers has increased considerably over the last two decades. Consequently, there appears success in recruiting people of color into the profession (Ingersoll, 2019; Ingersoll & May, 2015). Ingersoll and May (2015) report, “since the late 1980s the number of minority elementary and secondary teachers has ballooned by almost 100%, outpacing growth in the number of White teachers” (Ingersoll and May, 2015, p. 40). The data supports the belief that even with the growing number of employment opportunities for college students of color over the last two decades, more and more are choosing to make education their profession of choice.

Teacher attrition also varies based on teacher certification. The attrition rate for teachers in the social sciences, English, or elementary certified teachers, for example, is considered at a relatively low rate nationwide. However, the attrition rate for teachers certified in mathematics, science, special education, English language development, and foreign languages is far higher. These teachers are more likely to leave their school or the profession than those in other fields (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Ingersoll & Perda, 2010). The issue of attrition for

these types of certified teachers is exacerbated when the school is a Title I school. The turnover rate is far higher for Title I schools (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019). Teachers certified in Special Education leaving the classroom were found to be 2 ½ times higher than for other teachers (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004, p. 695).

The data vary considerably even among the high attrition certification subjects noted above. For a nation that committed in the 1950s to emphasize and fund the teaching of math and science, a large portion of teacher transitions come from the math and science fields. For instance, Ingersoll and Perda (2010) discovered:

over 64,000 qualified math and science teachers newly entered schools at the beginning of the 1999-2000 school year; by the following year, a more significant number – about 68,000 math and science teachers – moved from or left their schools. In other words, during that period, there were over 100,000 job transitions by mathematics and science teachers, representing almost one-third of the mathematics and science teaching force. (p. 24)

Teacher attrition also varies considerably by region. For instance, the total teacher turnover rates are highest in the Southern region (16.7%) of the U.S. while the Northern region (10.3%) has the lowest attrition rates (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Sutchter, et al., 2008). It can be speculated that part of the reason for the discrepancy is that salaries tend to be higher in the northern states than they are in the southern states.

In addition to the variation of teacher attrition by region, not surprisingly, teacher attrition varies wildly by state. Turnover rates vary among states. For example, as of 2017, the turnover rate was “just over 8% in Utah and 24% in Arizona” (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019, p. 7). While using older data, Sutchter et al. (2008) discovered the teacher attrition rate for

Tennessee was around 14%. Blatt (2016) examined the data on new teacher attrition in Oklahoma. He found that between 2006 and 2014, about 35% of Oklahoma first-year teachers left their school, and 17% left the public school system altogether. Furthermore, Blatt wrote that the average experience of Oklahoma's teachers fell to 11.4 years in 2015 from 12.8 years in 2006.

The COVID-19 outbreak in 2020 in the United States proves to contribute to teacher attrition. Recent surveys of teachers across the country have shown that the pandemic is causing a large portion of the teacher force to consider leaving the profession seriously. Steiner and Woo (2021) found that “one in four teachers were considering leaving their job by the end of the [2021-22] school year” (para. 2). Flannery (2020) reported a similar finding from the NEA, which found that 28% of teachers were more likely to retire early or leave the profession. The same report noted that 20% of teachers with less than ten years of teaching experience were among that group of leavers. “A study from the Professional Educators of Tennessee shows around 22% of teachers across Tennessee said they do not plan to stay in education — a fifth of the state's workforce for teaching children” (Rios, 2022, para. 1). In that same study, only around 50% of Tennessee teachers stated they would probably remain in the classroom at the end of the school year (Rios, 2022). California reported having a severe teacher shortage in four out of five of its school districts (Lambert, 2019). Recent estimates showed that around 800,000 teachers left the profession across the U.S. between January and November 2021 (Nguyen, 2022). A Fall of 2021 survey of teachers in Texas resulted in 66% of their educators indicating they were seriously considering leaving the profession (Huber, 2022). Furthermore, surveys found that minority teachers were far more likely to leave the profession due to the pandemic than white teachers (Flannery, 2020; Steiner & Woo, 2021). If these numbers turn out to be

accurate, not only could the attempt to diversify the teaching profession suffer greatly, but public schools will be put in an even more significant strain to find qualified teachers to put in the classrooms.

New teacher attrition has been a consistent issue with which school districts have had to deal. While new teacher attrition rates vary by state, system location, and even school within a school district, overall rates are pretty high. Smith and Ingersoll (2004) report that “29% of first-time teachers in 1999-2000 either changed schools at the end of the year [15%] or left teaching altogether [14%]” (p. 693). Gray and Taie (2015) noted that 10% of beginning teachers in 2007-08 did not return in 2008-09. The National Center for Education Statistics Report (2015) found that “21% [of teachers] with 1 year or less left [their current school]” (p. 4).

New teacher attrition rates only worsen from years two-five in teaching. Based on the data from the Teacher Follow-Up Survey (TFS), “the estimated rate of leaving during the first 3 years was 25.5%, during the first 4 years was 32.0%, and during the first 5 years was 38.5%” (Boe et al., 2008, p. 9). Norton (2015) states “that 50% of the teachers entering the teaching profession will leave the profession by the end of five years” (p. 15). Goldring et al. (2014) found that 80% of teachers in 2012-2013 with 1-3 years of experience remained in their first-year school the following year. “Tennessee reported an attrition rate of 13.2% during the first three years of the 2010s” (Sutcher et al., 2016, p. 80). Alarming, Ingersoll et al. (2018) reported that more than 44% of all new teachers in public and private schools leave teaching within five years of entering the profession.

Leavers are generally the concern for school districts; however, movers pose another problem with attrition in the teaching profession. Their attrition rate must also be taken into consideration. The effect on the school they are leaving is the same. Boe et al. (2008) discovered

that “between the years 1991-2001, the rate of teacher transfers among teachers with 1-3 years of teaching experience was 4 points higher than for teachers with 4-12 years of experience and 9 points higher than teachers who had 12 or more years of teaching experience” (p. 21). It was also found that middle school teachers were more likely to leave the profession than were elementary or high school teachers (Nguyen et al., 2019).

Finally, the age of the new teachers was not found to be a significant factor in new teacher attrition (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004). Nor has there been a significant difference in the new teacher turnover rate among rural, suburban, and urban school locations. However, there has been an increase in new teachers and a decrease in veteran teachers over the last few decades. Subsequently, new teachers are the largest group within the teaching profession. This greening of the teaching force has created numerous issues for school districts beyond teacher shortages (Ingersoll, 2012).

Factors Contributing to Teacher Attrition

The question that stems from the teacher attrition numbers is what are the factors contributing to that attrition? The research shows three significant factors for teacher attrition: retirement, nonrenewal, and voluntary/pre-retirement reasons.

The data indicate that less than one-third of teacher attrition is attributable to retirement (Carver-Thomas & Hammond-Darling, 2017; Ingersoll et al., 2018; Sutchter et al., 2019). Furthermore, the data indicate that around 10% of overall teacher attrition is due to involuntary reasons/nonrenewal of contracts (Goldring et al., 2014). In addition, approximately one-third of all first-year teachers classified as leavers reported involuntary reasons for termination (Ingersoll et al., 2018). Consequently, roughly two-thirds of teacher turnover/attrition is due to

voluntary/pre-retirement reasons. Thus the question, why do teachers choose to leave the profession?

There is some contradictory evidence in the literature on the role compensation plays in teacher attrition. In a large study completed by Harris et al. (2019), the researchers looked at different stakeholders' perceptions about teacher attrition. The results often countered many perceptions. For instance, "regarding compensation, only 30% of principals and 36% of parents believe teachers leave due to inadequate compensation, while 93% of teachers agreed that this was a common reason for teachers leaving" (Harris et al., 2019, pp. 8-9). It is essential to note that the survey went to all teachers, not just those who left. It was a survey on perceptions of attrition. However, when asking leavers why they left, compensation is often not among the top reasons provided. Headden (2013) discovered that compensation is not the primary concern. Headden states, "it's increasingly clear that it's not money, or a lack of it, that's causing most teachers to leave" (p. 5). Moreover, while compensation may likely be a reason for teacher attrition, it can be overcome if other conditions are satisfactory. Liu and Meyer (2005) posit that teachers are less likely to leave because of compensation if satisfactory other working conditions exist.

Compensation can be a factor behind teacher attrition. For instance, Black teachers, in particular, were far more likely to report leaving the teaching profession to pursue a better salary than were their other racial colleagues (Luekens et al., 2004). Ingersoll and May (2015) also reported that minority teachers were more likely to leave the profession, citing career advancement as the main reason for leaving than were the other races. In addition, about half of minority teachers, in general, reported job dissatisfaction as the main reason for leaving their job; of those that left, most reported the administration of the school, high-stakes assessment, paperwork, student discipline, and lack of input on school policy as reasons for their job

dissatisfaction (Ingersoll et al., 2019; Kersaint et al., 2005). An exciting finding was that male teachers and secondary teachers considered paperwork a significant factor more than female elementary teachers (Kersaint et al., 2006).

Rural school districts must deal with unique issues. For example, rural school districts find salary and compensation a significant cause for teacher attrition. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (n.d.), teachers in rural school systems earn from \$7,000 to \$8,000 less per year on average than their colleagues in urban school systems. This pay discrepancy contributes to teacher attrition in the rural systems. In addition to salary issues, rural systems encounter problems with teachers feeling isolated from their families and friends and the cost of travel for shopping and entertainment opportunities (Murphy & Angelski, 1996-97).

However, if pay was the paramount consideration for teachers in general, incentive pay for recruiting teachers in hard-to-fill areas and subjects would be more successful. Berry (2009) and Adamson and Darling-Hammond (2011) looked at incentive programs across the U.S. to determine their success. It was found that pay incentives alone are insufficient. South Carolina tried to recruit “teacher specialists” to work in schools with the lowest test scores. Even with an attractive bonus, they fell well short of their goal of 500 teachers. The reasons for lack of success included lack of administrative support in the schools and poor working conditions. In addition, Florida failed to attract enough teachers in its lucrative incentive program. Florida abandoned the program. Finally, a program in Dallas generated little interest. In the latter two programs, teachers reported similar issues in South Carolina: Working conditions greatly matter.

Poignantly, Loeb and Darling-Hammond (2005) point out that the strongest predictor of first-year teacher turnover is teachers’ rating of school conditions. Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2019) narrowed the meaning of school conditions as a lack of support from the

school administration. Research shows that administrative support likely positively influences the retention of teachers (Kersaint et al., 2005; Liu & Meyer, 2005; Ingersoll, 2001). Lack of administrative support was the most substantial reason for teacher attrition. “In a model controlling for other factors, teachers who strongly disagree that their administration is supportive are more than twice as likely to leave their school or teaching than teachers who strongly agree their administration is supportive” (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017, p. vi). Headden (2013) supports this statement by noting that the “primary driver of the exodus of early-career teachers is a lack of administrative and professional support” (p. 5). Finally, Boyd et al. (2009) and Ingersoll and Strong (2011) pointed to lack of administrative support as a significant reason for high teacher attrition rates. Based on a survey from 2010-2013, only slightly more than half of the teachers in Tennessee reported feeling supported by their administration (Sutcher et al., 2016).

Furthermore, in that large study completed by Harris et al. (2019), they found that over half (53%) of the teachers surveyed believed that teachers “leave because of issues related to trust and support in their school” (p. 8). Elyashiv (2018) completed a qualitative study to learn the perspective of school leaders on teacher attrition. The study found that “failure to provide them [new teachers] with a supportive environment while they are facing a heavy workload and difficult classes may result in dropout behavior [sic]” (p. 163).

The 2012 report “The Irreplaceables” created through The New Teacher Project defined the term irreplaceable teacher as a teacher considered highly effective in the classroom. Highly effective included teacher test data and in-classroom observations. To demonstrate the importance of administrative support in the school building, Jacob et al. (2012) found that 75% of what the researchers defined as irreplaceable new teachers said they would have remained in

the school had they been made to feel important and supported more often. Jacob et al. further stated that finding an irreplaceable teacher to replace an exiting irreplaceable teacher was a difficult task. They estimated that an average scoring school had a 1 in 6 chance and a low performing school had a 1 in 11 chance of finding a potential replacement of similar quality (p. 4).

In addition to administrative support, teachers have reported various other issues that drive whether or not they will stay in the school or the profession. These issues include school characteristics, discipline, influence over schoolwide decisions, and professional development/learning opportunities (Nguyen et al., 2019; Taylor, 2020; Teacher Attrition, 2021). Anecdotally, Jesse Solomon, the Boston Plan for Excellence executive director, said, “The biggest reason teachers leave is that they are working in a dysfunctional structure” (as cited in Headden, 2013, pp. 6-7). Teachers often feel that school administrators do not support them or are consistent when dealing with disciplinary matters. This lack of support is a significant reason for teacher dissatisfaction and a significant reason for teacher attrition (Liu & Meyer, 2005).

Family issues also ranked high in reasons for teacher turnover. Kersaint et al. (2005) noted that family responsibilities, including caring for children and family members, were ranked highly by all teachers – leavers and stayers. In a qualitative study completed by Schaefer et al. (2014), a new teacher interviewed said he did not mind spending 70-80 hours a day at school teaching, planning, grading, and coaching as a new single teacher. However, he knew he wanted to be in a relationship and have a family. This want bumped up against his current reality. He knew he could not put the same effort into being a teacher when he got married. So, the logical option was to leave the teaching profession to pursue having a family. This scenario plays out all across the nation.

Given that the education profession is predominantly and increasingly becoming more female-oriented, it is not surprising to find family issues as a significant cause of teacher attrition (Ingersoll et al., 2018). On a positive note, Grissom & Reininger (2012) discovered that over 40% of teachers who leave the teaching profession return to the profession within five years. The majority of the returners are female. The majority of the female returners did so after having children.

Teachers new to the profession experience all of these factors that lead to the previously discussed high rate of new teacher attrition/turnover; however, new teachers face a more daunting task than their more experienced colleagues. Fuller and Brown (1975) described three levels new teachers experience when they enter the classroom. The sequential stages are (a) survival, (b) self-adequacy, and (c) teaching impact. Hampden-Thompson et al. (2008) posit that 30%-50% of new teachers get stuck in the survival phase and feel compelled to abandon teaching (as cited in Pirkle, 2010). Moreover, Moir (1999) claims that novice teachers go through a series of phases in their first year of teaching. The crucial phases for new teachers show up around month two and last throughout the first semester. These phases are survival and disillusionment. As Ingersoll and Smith (2011) put it, “critics have long assailed teaching as an occupation that ‘cannibalizes its young’ and in which the initiation of new teachers is akin to a sink or swim, trial by fire, or boot camp experience” (p. 28). Taking these two theories and the critique into account, district and school leaders must recognize the struggles of new teachers and look for ways to address these challenges. As Bowman and Dowling (2008) say, the “reason new teachers leave is that teaching, as a profession, has been slow to develop a systematic way to induct beginners gradually into a highly complex job” (p. 397).

The Impact of Teacher Attrition

Teacher attrition and turnover have an impact on schools. The impact is felt in the changing demographics of the teaching force, school culture and climate, teacher shortage, and regionally.

In the Ingersoll et al. (2016) report, *Seven Trends: The Transformation of the Teaching Force*, the researchers note seven specific trends currently found in public education that result from teacher attrition. Ingersoll et al. support the belief that there is no significant supply issue attributing to the teacher shortage as the teaching force has grown considerably over the last three decades. The growth of the teaching force is roughly three times that of the growth of student population during that same time. Due, in part, to the growth of the teaching force, the teaching population has also become younger, greener, more female, and more racially diverse. Ingersoll et al. point out that minority teachers outpaced the growth of white teachers during the last three decades.

“However, while minorities have entered teaching at higher rates than whites in recent decades, the data also show that the rates at which minority teachers depart from schools is significantly higher than that of white teachers and has also been increasing” (p. 16). Again, these data support the belief that teachers’ supply is not the problem with teacher shortages. Teacher shortages result from teacher attrition (Ingersoll et al., 2018; 2019; Sutchter et al., 2016).

The impact of minority teacher attrition is found in other areas. For example, the disproportionate minority teacher turnover rate undermines efforts to recruit minority teachers in the hard-to-staff schools and racially diversify the teaching force (Ingersoll et al., 2018; 2019).

As was previously discussed, Ingersoll et al. (2018) determined that the teaching force was getting greener (less experienced) over the last three decades. The greening of the teaching force means increasing the hiring of new teachers. The majority of new teachers tend to be young. Younger teachers were far more likely to leave the profession than older teachers (Mack et al., 2019).

Furthermore, Ingersoll et al. (2018) pointed out that the teaching force was also becoming more female. The increase in female teachers directly impacts teacher turnover rates. Mack et al. (2019) state, “females are 3.6 times more likely to quit” teaching than are their male counterparts (p.9).

Teacher attrition also impacts student achievement. “Results demonstrate that teacher turnover has a significant and negative effect on student achievement in both math and ELA” (Rohnfeldt et al., 2013, p. 17). Interestingly, Ronfeldt et al. (2013) found that teacher attrition not only harmed student achievement for students in the classroom of the teacher leaving, but it somehow went beyond those classroom walls. Achievement in other classes in the same grade level was affected too. So, it appears the impact of teacher attrition is not confined to a classroom but may run horizontally across the entire grade level even if the other teachers in the grade level remain at the school. The attrition rate also has been shown to lead to lower average teacher effectiveness (Henry et al., 2012).

Research also suggests that teacher attrition impacts types of schools differently. Teacher attrition disproportionately impacts low-performing, high minority, urban, and rural schools. Often these are schools struggling with achievement. Teacher turnover exacerbates the issue (Kaden et al., 2016; Ramos & Hughes, 2020; Ronfeldt et al., 2013).

In Marinell and Coca's (2013) study on teacher attrition's impact on urban middle schools, the researchers found the impact went beyond student achievement. Marinell and Coca noted that the already scarce resources available to the middle schools would hire and train new teachers. The researchers further noted that high teacher attrition would also affect the stability of the culture within middle schools. Marinell and Coca concluded, "If middle schools are unstable and impersonal, students may find it even more difficult to manage the transitions into, through, and out of the critical middle grades" (p. vi).

As this study utilizes two rural school systems in the Appalachian region of the U.S., it is essential to note the impact teacher attrition has on rural areas in general and specifically on the Appalachian region. Cowen et al. (2012) discover that teachers are far more likely to leave Appalachia than transfer to it. The difficulties in recruiting and retaining teachers to the Appalachian region may be too much to overcome. "The divide in the teacher labor market presented by Appalachia appears real and largely impermeable, particularly with respect to entry into that region" (Cowen et al., 2012, p. 440). Part of the issue for these rural schools is culture and the demands of teaching in small rural settings. Rural low retention rates may be caused by limited knowledge of the rural community's culture, the demands of teaching multiple grade levels, and remote areas (Kaden et al., 2016). Thus, it is not surprising that "when teachers leave their Appalachian districts, they are more likely to leave teaching altogether" (Cowen et al., 2012, p. 440).

The impact of teacher attrition is far-reaching. Reducing the attrition rate would benefit schools and students of the U.S. in several ways. Headden (2013) provided examples of benefits in reducing teacher turnover. The researcher stated scores would go up, need fewer instructional coaches, discipline would improve, relationships with students would improve, and stability

would improve. In addition to all the benefits mentioned above, Sutchter et al. (2016) state, “reducing [teacher] attrition could virtually eliminate overall shortages” (p. 39).

Monetary Impact of Teacher Attrition

In addition to the impact teacher attrition has on the areas discussed above, the impact is also felt monetarily. Determining the monetary impact of teacher attrition is a difficult task. The results of the research vary tremendously. The reason for the variance in impact is in the collection of data. A large percentage of school districts (especially the smaller districts) do not keep a record of the cost of teacher attrition (Barnes et al., 2007; Headden, 2013; Kersaint, 2005; Sutchter et al., 2016; Teacher Attrition, 2021; Villar & Strong, 2007; Wong & Breaux, 2003).

The monetary impact of teacher attrition varies considerably based on the region and size of the school district. For example, the National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future (NCTAF) determined the cost of teacher attrition in various parts of the country. In Chicago, the cost of attrition was \$17,872 per teacher. In Granville County, N.C., the cost was \$9,875 per teacher. The cost in Jemez Valley, N.M., was \$4,366. The cost in Milwaukee, Wisc., was \$15,325 (Headden, 2013). Wong and Breaux (2003) provided a conservative estimate of more than \$50,000 to replace a teacher who leaves during the first three years of teaching.

Nationwide estimates on the cost of teacher attrition vary just as significantly. All4Ed (2021) estimates the cost to be around \$2.2 billion annually for the United States. Kersaint (2005) provides a cost of teacher attrition in the United States at about \$4.9 billion annually. This amount is to replace teachers who have left the profession or changed schools. “The NCTAF reports the cost of teacher attrition comes in north of \$7 billion a year nationwide. The amount only includes teacher induction and recruitment” (Barnes et al., 2007, p. 83). Sutchter et al. (2016) estimate teacher attrition costs as more than \$8 billion annually. According to Kersaint

(2005), the cost of teacher attrition to the state of Tennessee in 2003 was about \$88 million. Kersaint sums it up regardless of the actual cost. “The loss – to taxpayers, schools, educators, students, and communities – is immense” (Kersaint, 2005, para. 17).

Given the monetary impact of teacher attrition, the next question is are new teacher induction programs cost-effective. Once again, the answer is not clear given the uncertainty of the actual cost to school systems. However, some research has been conducted on school systems that provide data on cost and have induction programs.

Using conservative estimates from induction models across the country, “the approximate average cost of induction is \$4,000 per teacher, per year” (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2010, p. 12). More specifically, a cost analysis of a California school district found the two-year comprehensive program cost \$13,000 but brought a \$21,000 return in benefits. The program resulted in a 65% return on the induction investment (Villar & Strong, 2007). In other words, “Assuming the costs of hiring a replacement represent 50% of a new teacher’s salary, an investment in an intensive model of new teacher induction in a given district pays \$1.66 for every \$1 spent” (Villar & Strong, 2007, p. 16). Consequently, it is cost-effective for a school district to implement a comprehensive new teacher induction program.

New Teacher Induction Programs

Wei et al. (2009) looked internationally for commonalities among the educational systems in the highest achieving nations of the world. The highest-achieving nations on international tests focus on developing the expertise of teachers throughout their careers. That focus begins in year one of a teaching career. A supportive new teacher induction program is one of those commonalities. Wei et al. (2009) also noted that not only do high achieving nations provide an induction program for new teachers, but they provide comprehensive induction

programs that include release time for professional development, an experienced and trained mentor, and observations of other teachers. Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) supported the statement regarding procedures practiced in high-achieving nations. These international studies prompted Carver-Thomas and Hammond-Darling (2017) to pronounce, “districts should provide high-quality mentoring and induction to beginning teachers, and in particular, should consider how these supports can meet the needs of a diverse workforce” (p. 34). Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) described components of induction programs that have shown to be successful in the highest achieving countries in the world. These components include mentor teachers for beginning teachers, an opportunity for collegial work, and opportunities for professional growth. Unfortunately, in much of the United States, comprehensive new teacher induction programs are not being properly utilized or not at all. Former Secretary of Education Arne Duncan saw the lack of quality comprehensive new teacher induction programs throughout the nation when he said, “smart induction policies and well-designed mentoring for new teachers is the exception, rather than the rule” (Duncan, 2010, para. 6).

The research pointed to numerous benefits a new teacher induction program offers to the world of education. For instance, the Alliance for Excellent Education (2010) concluded that a comprehensive induction program provides the following benefits: keeps quality teachers in the profession, weeds poor teachers out, teaches beginning teachers clinical, practical skills, builds a community of teachers who are learners, orients teachers into their local school, orients teachers into the efficacy and worth of their profession. Keeping quality teachers is paramount among the benefits mentioned above.

In their report, *A Coming Crisis in Teaching?*, Sutcher et al. (2016) gravely discussed crises that may arise because of the growing teacher shortages in schools across the nation.

Support is the key to retaining teachers. “With new teachers leaving at high rates, especially in urban and poor rural areas, the revolving door cannot be slowed until the needs for beginning teacher support are addressed” (Sutcher et al., 2016, p. 64). As discussed in this paper, this revolving door is especially significant with minority teachers. Ingersoll and May (2015) discovered that more minority teachers left the teaching profession at the end of 2003-04 than entered the profession at the beginning of that year. The researchers determined a need to focus on the retention and recruitment of minority teachers. To that end, teachers who found support from their mentors, administration, community, or colleagues showed an increased likelihood to remain in education (Jacobson et al., 2020; Prilleltensky et al., 2016; Ronfeldt & McQueen, 2017). This new teacher support must begin immediately. “Support must be provided beginning on the first day of teaching and continued until the teacher can demonstrate that he or she has reached the impact level in all six areas.” The six areas are “individual relationships, pedagogical knowledge, teacher perceptions of professional competence, mentoring, professional learning, and reflection” (Reitman & Karge, 2018, p.17).

To retain teachers, especially in the hard-to-fill positions, the school and district leaders must create a “context that allows [the new teachers] to feel supported and become effective” (Sutcher et al., 2016, p. 66). This support can come in the form of new teacher induction programs. Upon reviewing three large-scale studies, Ingersoll & Strong (2011) found that “beginning teachers who received some type of induction had higher job satisfaction, commitment, or retention” (p. 211). Furthermore, Ingersoll and Strong (2011) found empirical evidence to support the claim that induction programs positively affect new teachers. Research supports the position that induction programs were significantly associated with a teacher’s likelihood of remaining with his/her school (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011; Ingersoll & Smith, 2004).

However, the strength of that likelihood depended on the type and number of supports the teacher received. Using a limited study relegated to one state, 2% of the teachers in Alabama that participated in a comprehensive new teacher induction program did not return to teaching the following year (Kent et al., 2012). However, in a far more extensive study, it was noted that “migration and attrition rates were four to five percentage points lower among first-year teachers who received four or more supports as compared with matched teachers who received fewer than four supports” from a new teacher induction program (Ronfeldt & McQueen, 2017, p. 408). Given the reported numbers of teachers leaving by year five, these differences are meaningful.

The literature presented several options as to the definition of a comprehensive new teacher induction program. The standard components among the literature include a mentor from the same subject area/grade level, a helpful trained mentor, participation in seminars or classes for beginning teachers, common planning time with other teachers in their subject area/grade level, regularly scheduled collaboration with other teachers, participation in a network of teachers, regular supportive communication with their principal, other administrators, or department chairs, reduction of teaching schedule, reduction of the number of preparations, and extra classroom assistance (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2010; Ingersoll & Smith, 2004; Long, 2010; Podolsky, 2016; Wong, 2005). As it is difficult for a school or district to provide all components listed above, four have shown to be the most impactful in abating teacher attrition. “The strongest factors were having a mentor from the same field, having common planning time with other teachers in the same subject, having regularly scheduled collaboration with other teachers, and being part of an external network of teachers” (Ingersoll & Smith, 2004, p. 35).

The reality is that few new teachers receive a comprehensive induction program. For example, less than 1% of all new teachers received a combination of 6 or more of the

components mentioned earlier of an induction program (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004). Getting access to multiple factors or components of an induction program has shown to be a positive step in preventing teacher turnover. Smith and Ingersoll (2004) posit that when new teachers are provided multiple components of the induction program, there is a statistically significant and robust correlation with teacher turnover. The researchers found that the combination of components has also successfully reduced teacher migration from school to school.

In addition to aiding the reduction of teacher turnover, new teacher induction programs have shown to be effective in other areas for teachers, schools, and students. For example, new teacher induction programs have been shown to accelerate the effectiveness of teachers and, consequently, have a positive effect on student achievement and academic gains (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011; Moir, 2009). Unlike the national more extensive scaled studies in the two studies mentioned above, not all studies have shown that new teacher induction leads to higher student achievement or academic gains. In the sample size of only Illinois teachers who did not participate in an induction program, it must be noted that Wechsler et al. (2010) “did not find a statistically significant difference in student achievement gains among beginning teachers receiving any induction and beginning teachers receiving no induction” (p. 93). However, Wechsler et al. found near-unanimous confidence in the ability to teach, classroom management skills, and redirect disruptive students among teachers participating in comprehensive induction programs. The research demonstrates that induction programs for new teachers tend to produce well-rounded and effective teachers. Indeed, Ingersoll (2012) reported that all significant aspects of teaching (i.e., classroom discipline, keeping students on task, workable lesson plans, and higher test scores) improved for new teachers who participated in a comprehensive new teacher induction program.

International research has acknowledged mentoring as an integral component of comprehensive induction programs (Kent et al., 2012). The research further shows that the mentor must be trained and from the same field or grade level as the new teacher. “High-quality mentors must be identified and then provided with relevant training. Being a good teacher is not adequate preparation for mentoring. Mentors need support just as new teachers do” (Wiebke & Bardin, 2009, p. 35). In addition to finding a link between new teacher retention and involvement in an induction program, the researchers also found that when the induction program involves a mentor from the new teacher’s subject area and have a common planning time with the mentor or collaboration with other teachers, the effectiveness of the induction program on teacher retention increases (Ingersoll, 2012; Teacher Attrition, 2021). The research also suggests that including a mentor teacher in the induction program is particularly effective at the elementary school level (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). Pan et al. (2000) described three significant benefits of having a mentor program. The benefits include: the mentors assist in indoctrinating new teachers to the school culture, fostering self-esteem, and increasing knowledge of teaching skills. In a large qualitative study, Ramos & Hughes (2020) reported one new teacher putting it this way:

I have thought about quitting more than once. The behaviors that students have are extreme, and I have never felt so degraded and harassed. If it were not for the support of my admin and coach, I would have quit in the first month. I do not know how much more SI can withstand, but as long as they are trying, I will try as well. (p. 51)

The literature further indicates that the selection of mentors is a vital part of the mentor component. The reality too often is novice teachers are hired to replace the only person who would have been a likely mentor for the novice teacher (Gagen & Bowie, 2005). Therefore, recruiting the right mentors is the first step in the mentoring process. First of all, school districts

need to understand the community of the schools and district as a whole. Wiebke and Bardin (2009) suggest districts first recruit mentors from the communities they will serve. In doing so, these mentors will be familiar with the culture and the particular challenges found in that community or school. Next, district leaders must be highly selective of mentors within the community. As Kent et al. (2012) discuss, “mentors must be leaders, able to guide new teachers toward developing long-term professional goals, including helping new teachers discover the ways that students think in order to assist in the development of students’ critical thinking and reasoning skills” (p. 3). Unfortunately, mentors are often assigned without strategic forethought and placed in a no-win situation. Gagen and Bowie (2005) point out that experienced and effective teachers have been placed in a mentor position without seeking the job. The researchers further note that these mentors receive little/no training and have no clear definition of the task at hand. When this happens, new teachers and their mentors can become frustrated. “In fact, most mentors have never seen a formal job description of their duties and have little idea what those duties might be” (Gagen & Bowie, 2005, p. 40). Consequently, the induction program is far less effective.

Mentors must be provided with training in educational leadership and coaching (Callahan, 2016; Pan, 2000; Pirkle, 2011; Podolsky, 2016). Mentors who went through a selective process and training stated they were more effective as a mentor and could assist the new teachers in an impactful manner (Wechsler et al., 2010). The mentor training must teach mentors how to be education leaders. The mentor training must show mentors how to guide new teachers in the development of long-term professional goals along with how to find ways to assist in the development of students’ critical thinking and reasoning skills (Kent et al., 2012). Unfortunately, many mentor teachers do not receive training in doing the job correctly. Even

effective teachers sometimes struggle as mentors since many do not possess the expertise or the skills for the role (Long, 2010).

Consequently, “mentors need job-embedded professional development tailored to meet the needs of adult learners and their coaches” (Moir, 2009, p. 16). Martin et al. (2016) concur with the need to provide training for the mentor teachers, noting that providing a qualified, trained mentor is the “critical component of the induction process” (p. 9). When asked, teachers say mentors are valuable assets to their success when new to the profession. In their qualitative study, Williams et al. (2016) noted that the Ohio Resident Educator Program participants overwhelmingly found the collaboration with mentors as helping guide them through their first years of teaching.

Not only should mentors be trained, but mentors should also assume numerous other roles in the induction process. With some conflicting findings regarding induction programs showing mixed results in teacher retention, Bowden and Portis-Woodson (2017) suggest induction programs add or move in another direction. They say, “What new teachers need are processes and procedures to manage their responsibilities, along with tips, ideas, and solutions to have as seamless transition into the profession as possible” (p. 8). These include balancing personal and professional life and a balance among assessment, planning, and mentoring. Mentor teachers need to be more than a buddy for their mentees. Mentors must help new teachers learn how to effectively teach the specific demographics of the school and community (Martin et al., 2016). Anecdotally, one North Carolina mentor teacher noted her “main approach involves building a confidential and trusting relationship with her mentee, offering non-evaluative feedback through informal observations and, when needed, co-teaching to model instructional strategies” (Heubeck, 2021, para. 25). The trusting and confidential relationship with the mentee

is significant for Generation Y teachers. Cogshall et al. (2009) and Martin et al. (2016) state that Generation Y teachers require a personal, trusting relationship with their mentors. If there was no relationship, any observations or insights from the mentor tended to be less beneficial.

Mentor involvement with new teachers must be in place at the start of a new teacher's career. Pickle (2011) advises that the mentor should be present and active from the beginning of the hiring process. In other words, mentors should be involved in the interview and hiring process. By doing so, it would be easier for district/school leadership to pair up mentors with mentees. Nasser-Abu Ahija and Fresko (2016) reported that mentors must go beyond being a buddy to the new teachers. The researchers expressed how mentors must work to acclimate new teachers to the school and community culture, familiarize new teachers with school rules, to being accepted as colleagues, and understand and perform their non-teaching duties. Clark and Byrnes (2012) support Nasser-Abu Ahija and Fresko in discovering the top three most helpful forms of mentoring support: the mentor being a good listener, the mentor encouraging the mentee during times of self-doubt, and mentor modeling professional behavior when dealing with parents. New teachers who have participated in an induction program and had the benefit of a mentor agree with the need for support in areas beyond the pedagogical world. While most mentees in the Kent et al. (2012) study found mentoring very helpful, a supermajority of mentees found the social/emotional support and classroom management to be particularly helpful. In looking at induction programs in California, Long (2010) noted that mentees can choose their mentors from a mentor pool after several social gatherings and workshops. The idea is to allow the matching of personalities. Conversely, Nasser-Abu Ahija & Fresko (2016) found that the new teachers in their study considered being paired with mentors from their subject areas as highly beneficial and of high importance.

While the research varies as to optimal length, it is clear that new teachers must spend at least one year in an induction program. It does appear that “programs that are more comprehensive, or longer, or include more depth of support appear to be better” (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011, p. 228). Kersaint et al. (2005) suggest new teachers participate in induction programs during their first three years.

The length of induction programs also varies by state. For example, New Jersey found that a four-year induction program was the ideal timeframe for their teachers (Tew, 2018). An extensive urban school system in Florida created a two-year induction program for their new teachers (Jackson & Bogle, 2011). As far as being a mentor is concerned, Moir (2009) promotes the idea that mentor teachers leave the classroom and serve as mentors for three years, then move back into the classroom or to other leadership positions. One benefit is that attracting the best teachers into the mentoring program creates a “grow your own” scenario for the school district. Like Moir (2009), Headden (2014) says mentor teachers need to be relieved of classroom duties. The researcher further found that mentors from the elementary level have shown to be effective in working with new teachers at the secondary level and vice versa.

Another integral component of the induction process is administrative support – both system-wide and at the school level. The tone and ultimate success of an induction program are predicated on the commitment at the district level. “Induction programs are most effective when all stakeholders are represented in the program design and when new teacher induction is part of a districtwide initiative to improve teaching and learning” (Moir, 2009, p. 16). For example, the Peer Assistance and Review (PAR) program is utilized by school districts. Simply put, a new teacher is assigned a trained mentor (consulting teacher) who works with him/her throughout the first year of teaching. The mentor teacher reports to a PAR pair consisting of a teacher and a

principal throughout the year. The mentor teacher provides a summative review of the new teacher's performance, and the PAR pair determines whether to retain the new teacher the next year and, if so, what areas of teaching the new teacher will work to improve his/her craft (Johnson et al., 2010). The PAR program has shown some success. Wiens et al. (2018) concluded that by utilizing the PAR program, school systems could reduce their teacher turnover and that even with the expense involved in using the PAR program, districts would still save money in the long run due to the normal teacher attrition. Over three years, Wiens et al. (2018) found that schools participating in the PAR program saw their teacher retention rate increase from 69% to 79%. "PAR schools saw a reduction in transiency [of teachers] by nearly double that of the next closest school group" (p. 108).

The same commitment required at the district level administration to the induction process is valid at the school administrative level. "If induction is to develop teachers into high-quality professionals who improve student learning, then it must be the priority of the instructional leader" (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2010, p. 22). Strong principal support is vital to the induction and mentoring program (Martin et al., 2015; Wiebke & Bardin, 2009). Just as the researchers noted the importance of mentor training, the same is valid for administrators. Administrators must also be trained in leadership and how to best support new teachers (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017, 2019). Not only should new teacher induction be critical to the school administration, but the research notes it should go beyond a professional development level and reach a personal level. Perna (2022) notes that a successful induction program is the bedrock of personal relationships or human connections between administrators and instructors. Teachers, like students, need to feel they are cared for and trust their administration. In addition to the benefits of building personal relationships, the research suggests that the more involved

the school level administration is in the induction and mentoring process, the more influential the new teachers are and the better chance for retention of new teachers (Sutcher et al., 2016). Moir (2009) plainly states, “By working together, principals and mentors can create environments where teacher learning is supported, and students benefit” (p. 17).

Rural school systems and schools provide unique challenges in teacher recruitment and teacher retention (Cowen et al., 2012; Kaden et al., 2016; Sutcher et al., 2016). Consequently, rural systems must provide a comprehensive and distinctive new teacher induction program. Rural system/school induction should be “created with the thought of increasing retention rates by meeting the social and personal needs of new teachers who may have strong misgivings about moving into smaller communities even moderately far from larger towns” (Kono, 2012, p. 131).

Lowe (2006) suggests that rural districts make teacher recruitment and retention an integral part of the district strategic plan, given the unique challenges rural systems face. The strategies need to be bold for new teacher recruitment and retention. Rural systems/schools must pay special attention to their induction programs. These new teachers need help to understand the unique culture of the rural schools and support for the specific demands of job assignments in small rural schools (Kaden et al., 2016).

Lowe (2006) also discusses ideas that could benefit the recruitment of teachers in rural school districts. For instance, create partnerships with local educator preparation programs (EPP). In these partnerships, the researcher notes that teachers and administrators could volunteer to be guest speakers in the EPPs describing the benefits of teaching in the rural school district. Furthermore, Lowe (2006) provides numerous suggestions to aid in retaining new teachers in rural districts. The suggestions include: administrators and mentors contacting new hires immediately after the new hire signs a contract and maintain contact throughout the

summer; assist in finding housing and moving; celebrate their arrival to the district; create cooperatives with other rural districts; create future teacher clubs in the schools; and encourage quality retired teachers to return to the classroom or become mentors. These suggestions match other research on the importance of administrator/mentor contact with new hires. Podolsky (2016) states that new teachers are more likely to remain in education when leadership effectively communicates with new teachers in rural settings. Moreover, “school administrators can enhance the likely success of their new hires by actively seeking to familiarize them with explicit teaching expectations as well as the hidden social subtleties and expectations of their new schools and communities” (Fry & Anderson, 2011, p. 13). In addition, school administrator leadership has been shown to increase the effectiveness of the mentors as they work with the new teachers (Clark & Byrnes, 2012).

Unfortunately, there is little or no communication between administrators and new teachers in many cases. Lowe (2006) provided a wealth of suggestions on just how rural administrators can keep in contact with their new hires and make them feel welcome and wanted. The researcher suggests having a rural-focused induction program for teachers who will be new to the rural school community. The induction program could include: information about the school and community, the contact information of local real estate agencies or apartment hunters, weekly postcards or notes about looking forward to working with them in the upcoming school year, provide links to newspapers, houses of worship, or other sites about the area, help with moving, celebrate their arrival. In short, give the most precious commodity – time. As Sinek (2014) notes, “if someone is willing to give us something of which they have a fixed and finite amount, a completely nonredeemable commodity, we perceive greater value” (p. 119). If people feel valued by their leaders, they will often forgo higher salaried positions and remain with their

company (Sinek, 2019). Rural schools, in particular, must provide environments that are attractive for new teachers to recruit and retain these teachers as rural systems pay less than their urban and suburban counterparts (Lowe, 2006). These attractive environments in rural schools fall within the purview of the principal. As Hughes et al. (2014) said, “a principal who made a teacher feel like they make a difference by supporting activities within teacher’s classrooms contributed to a teacher wanting to stay employed in their current positions” (p. 132). The research has found that collaborative opportunities and administrative support ranked highly in importance among new teachers (Hunter 2016; Taylor, 2020). The importance of administrative support and presence is vital to the teacher’s success in the classroom and the school.

Rural districts face one unique challenge to finding, training, and utilizing mentors. As one rural teacher stated, “mentor teachers are generally too absorbed in meeting all of their classroom expectations and extracurricular activities to invest in their mentees” (Hope Street Group, 2017, p. 16). North Dakota created a program to aid in alleviating rural mentor issues. The North Dakota Teacher Support System (NDTSS) allows local school systems and schools to participate in a state-level induction program. Veteran teachers learn to become mentors in a two-day state-provided professional development training. A mentor teacher may further their learning as a mentor and complete a rigorous three-year training program and become an Advanced Mentor. North Dakota then provides grants for the NDTSS and local school systems. These NDTSS grants allow the local systems to fund induction activities, including book studies, teacher release time, and online courses. (Jacobson et al., 2020).

The research showed that the NDTSS has been successful in retaining teachers. “Teachers who participated in the NDTSS Mentoring Program were retained at an 11% greater rate than teachers who did not participate in the Mentoring Program. Further, the rate of retention

for NDTSS participants is 6% more than the overall retention rate for all North Dakota teachers over the three school years analyzed in the study” (Jacobson et al., 2020, p. 51).

Iowa found a way to overcome the problem of providing trained mentors for their rural school systems. Rural systems in Iowa created a cooperative in which these systems shared selected and trained mentors. These mentors are removed from the classroom and assigned to new teachers throughout the region. Interestingly, the assignment is not based on subject or grade level. The mentor assignments are more based on the mentors’ location in regards to the new teacher placements (Headden, 2013). Furthermore, Headden reported that pairing elementary mentors with new teachers at the secondary level provided the opportunity for the secondary teachers to learn pedagogical strategies. In contrast, secondary mentors brought a wealth of content knowledge to the new teachers at the elementary level.

The 2010 National Staff Development Council (NSDC) and Stanford Center for Opportunity Policy in Education (SCOPE) study looked at professional development opportunities across all fifty states using eleven criteria. In Tennessee, the researchers found that 52.5% of new teachers participated in an induction program, and only 72% were assigned a mentor. Furthermore, the study found that less than 51% of new teachers in Tennessee reported being provided four out of five induction supports. The five induction supports include professional development, mentoring, common planning time, attendance in seminars/classes, and regular supportive communication with a principal/administrator (Wei et al., 2010). Their findings were consistent with a statewide study of Tennessee teachers. The Hope Street Group (2017) discovered that 50% of all new teachers were assigned a mentor, 46% of new teachers were provided an orientation, and 40% were provided common planning time with other teachers in grade level or content area. The study also found that 27% received ongoing training designed

for new teachers, 18% received no additional support as a new teacher, 17% received release time to observe other teachers, 95% had a formal time to meet with mentors, and 5% received a reduced workload. Finally, Hope Street Group found that 31% of new teachers developed standards-aligned lesson plans with a mentor, 29% had a mentor to observe mentee in the classroom, 27% did not engage with a mentor in any activity, 26% observed their mentor, 22% analyzed student work with a mentor, and 18% reviewed assessments with a mentor.

Whether the school system or the school is rural, suburban, or urban, the research provided suggestions for retaining quality new teachers. Jacob et al. (2012) describe irreplaceable teachers as those teachers who have shown to be effective via classroom observations and standardized test scores. Jacob et al. noted that school districts must prioritize retaining those teachers deemed to be irreplaceable. As a goal, “in general, districts should aim to keep more than 90 percent of their Irreplaceables every year” (Jacob et al., 2012, p. 29). An example of induction that has shown success in retaining those irreplaceable teachers was provided by Pan et al. (2000). These researchers detailed an array of support strategies for beginning teachers that should be available for use in teacher induction and mentoring programs. For example, reciprocal classroom observations, model teaching; team teaching; collaborative curriculum development; and teaming all offer important vehicles and techniques to develop the knowledge and skills of new teachers (Pan et al., 2000). In addition, induction programs should focus on teacher retention and utilize measures to help teachers better address classroom management. For instance, induction programs need “to enhance teachers’ classroom management skills, school policies can be developed that provide clear, coherent, and consistent rules and consequences for student behavior, and administrators can support teachers in the enforcement of disciplinary policies” (Kersaint et al., 2005, p. 790).

As not every new teacher to a school is a new teacher to the profession, schools must be cognizant that experienced teachers also need induction. However, experienced teachers usually do not need the same types of support. Consequently, a different induction program should be created and provided for the influx of experienced teachers into open positions. These experienced teachers could be those reentering the teaching field, those moving from one school to another, and switching teaching assignments or grade levels (Boe et al., 2008).

New teachers are not consistently receiving the support they require as novices in the classroom. One former California teacher addressed her experience with her school district's new teacher induction and mentoring program. In the Graziano (2004) study, the teacher stated:

In practice, the induction program turned out to be something of a pep rally for new teachers, not a training exercise. The mentor teachers who had promised to help did what they could but were either teaching different grade levels or classes and, once the semester got underway, had their teaching concerns to address. In the end, I stopped asking for help. I was sinking, yet no one in the administration noticed. The principal, a former English teacher, observed my classes a few times and offered tips on my woefully underdeveloped classroom-management style, but she seemed unconcerned by my obvious lack of experience. (para. 30)

Teachers across the country can express this sentiment. Educational leaders must notice and put structures in place to retain and grow new teachers. Wong (2003) confidently asserted, "if you induct your new teachers, they will stay, you will save, and children will succeed" (p. 22)!

Conclusion

The review of the research literature provided five distinct five distinct conclusions. Teacher attrition is a nationwide issue that can be more pronounced based on the school type

and/or the subject taught. In addition, there are numerous factors contributing to teacher attrition that include: salary/compensation, school climate/culture, student behavior, administrative leadership, family issues, and feeling of isolation. Furthermore, teacher attrition is detrimental to student learning and to the profession of education. Teacher attrition has a sizable and costly monetary impact on public education. Finally, one of the most effective ways to combat teacher attrition is to provide support for teachers, especially support for new teachers through a comprehensive new teacher induction program.

Chapter 3

Research Methodology

A wealth of research exists regarding teacher attrition, and the impact teacher attrition has on student learning and teacher shortages (Lowrey, 2012; Marinell & Coca, 2013; Shockley et al., 2013; Taylor, 2020). Furthermore, research is available regarding new teacher induction programs and their impact on education (Ingersoll, 2012; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011; Moir, 2009; Ramos & Hughes, 2020; Teacher Attrition, 2021; Tew, 2018; Wiens et al., 2018). However, there is a limited amount of emerging qualitative research on teachers' perceptions of the support provided to teachers in these new teacher induction programs. There is no research on teachers' perceptions in the two rural Tennessee school districts that are the subject of this research. This study investigated teachers' perception of support from new-teacher induction programs in two rural Tennessee school districts.

Research Question

How do new teachers in two rural Tennessee school districts perceive support from participating in a new-teacher induction program?

Research Design

The researcher chose qualitative research as the methodology for this research project. As Merriam and Tisdell (2017) state about qualitative research, "the product of qualitative inquiry is *richly descriptive*" (p. 17). Consequently, a qualitative approach provided the opportunity for narrative examples of the participants. A qualitative approach allowed the participants to fully express their feelings and thoughts about participating in the respective new teacher induction programs. Moreover, the researcher utilized the steps for collecting and analyzing data laid out by Cresswell (2018) that include: (1) organizing the transcribed interviews, (2) reading the

transcriptions for broad themes, (3) coding and categorizing the data, (4) describing the emerging themes, (5) representing qualitative narratives, and (6) interpreting the findings. This approach provided a systematic way to investigate the teachers' perceptions of their new teacher induction programs. In addition, the study's qualitative approach allowed for rich and meaningful insights for all stakeholders with an interest in implementing new teacher programs.

Site Selection

The researcher chose two school sites for this study. The selected school systems represented large and medium-sized rural counties in Tennessee, respectively (Tennessee Counties by Population, n.d.).

System A was a rural system located in the Middle Grand Division of Tennessee. The system consists of seven schools (five Pre-K to 8th Grade schools, one Consolidated 9-12 High School, one Virtual/Alternative School), 4,112 students, 237 classroom teachers, and has a 15:1 student-to-teacher ratio. Approximately 10% of the student body in System A is a minority, are from underrepresented groups with Latino students comprising the majority of underrepresented students. The district male-to-female ratio was approximately 50%. Finally, the graduation rate for System B was 92% (Public School Review, 2021). No colleges or universities that provide an education preparation program are located within 50 miles of System A.

System B was a rural system located in the Eastern Grand Division of Tennessee. The system consists of sixteen schools (two high schools, one grade 5-8 school, nine Pre-K-8 schools, one Pre-K-4 school, and one K-12 laboratory school), 8,479 total students, 554 classroom teachers, and has a 15:1 student: teacher ratio. Approximately 7% of the student body in System B is from an underrepresented group, with Latino students comprising the majority of underrepresented students. Additionally, the district has a male-to-female ratio of approximately

50%. Finally, the graduation rate for System A was 95% (Public School Review, 2021). Four universities within 50 miles of System B provide educator preparation programs.

Participants in the Study

After obtaining initial permission from Milligan University's Institutional Review Board (IRB), both school systems provided written permission to conduct the study. The Director of Schools for each system approved the study.

The study participants represented teachers who participated in or are participating in their respective school district's new teacher induction program. The participants for both the survey and the focus groups represented a variety of differences. The differences among the participants involved gender, teaching experience ranging from 0-30 years, grade levels taught ranging from Kindergarten-grade 12, a variety of content areas (i.e., English, social studies, special education, physical education), and ages ranging from 22-57. All of the participants identified as white/Caucasian.

The total number of participants on the survey from System A was 22. The focus groups involved 4 of the 22 survey participants. The focus groups were held via Google Meet and scheduled at times convenient for the participants. The total number of participants on the survey from System B was 32. The focus groups involved 10 of the 32 survey participants. The focus groups were held via Google Meet and were also scheduled at times convenient for the participants.

Role of Researcher

Although the researcher was a teacher in System B, he did not participate nor experience the new-teacher induction program being studied. The researcher was familiar with several of the participants of the survey and focus groups. This familiarity may have introduced some bias

related to previous interactions with the participants. However, the researcher had a minimal connection with System A and was not familiar with any participants in the survey or the focus groups.

The role of the researcher in the study was neo-positivist. The researcher took a “stance that is non-judgmental, sensitive, and respectful of the respondent[s]” (Merriam & Tisdale, 2017, p. 130). The researcher acted as the interview facilitator for the focus group by asking prescribed and critical follow-up questions (Appendix B). A questionnaire survey was also completed by teachers who participated in the respective districts’ induction programs. The researcher emailed each participant and requested that they complete the short survey (Appendix C). The participants responded to the survey via Google Forms. The responses were kept confidential.

Data Collection Methods and Procedures

The data collection method employed for this study was qualitative via a questionnaire survey and focus group interviews adapted from a study completed by Hunter (2016). The validity and reliability of the data were established through member checking or participant validation (Birt et al., 2016). Participants were provided data results to ensure their words and narratives were accurately represented. The participants had the opportunity to add, delete, or correct any of their responses. Furthermore, the study’s validity was grounded in the demographic representation of the participants.

Before the Study

The study was approved by the appropriate organizations. The vetting and approval included Milligan University’s Institutional Review Board (IRB). In addition, each school systems’ director approved the study.

Participating School Systems

Both school systems are rural, county school systems that primarily serve rural student populations. Due to the demographics of the two counties, diversity was lacking among the participants in the study. Each school system provided a list of new teachers involved in induction programs to participate in the study.

Selection of Participants

Participants were selected based on their participation in their school system's new teacher induction program. The researcher first sent the invitation to complete a survey questionnaire to the directors of each school system's program. The directors forwarded the invitation to the teachers who are participating or have participated in the induction program. Completion of the survey was voluntary. Next, the researcher contacted the teachers who completed the survey to ask for their participation in focus groups. Involvement in the focus groups was voluntary. Participants provided consent when they agreed to participate in the focus group interviews. Moreover, the researcher informed the participants of their right to abstain from participation in the focus group interviews and/or stop participating in the focus group interviews at any time. The participants agreed to participate in the focus group interviews via Google Meet.

Implementation of the Study

Upon gaining permission from the school districts involved in the study, the researcher sent a Google Form with the survey questionnaire to both systems' directors of their respective induction programs (Appendix B). The directors forwarded the questionnaire survey to the teachers in the systems who participated or are participating in the new teacher induction programs. The respondents had two weeks to complete the survey.

Once the survey was completed, the researcher emailed each survey participant requesting they participate in a focus group. Over the next four weeks, the researcher scheduled times with the participants who agreed to participate in the focus groups and completed the interviews using a predetermined set of open-ended questions (Appendix C). The sessions were completed and recorded via Google Meet. These recordings were maintained on the researcher's password-protected Google Suite Account. During the interviews, the researcher-maintained notes to aid in transcription. Upon completing the interviews, the researcher used an artificial intelligence software system, Sonix (www.sonix.ai), to transcribe the interviews. The researcher listened to the interviews and read the transcripts to correct any inaccuracies. Next, the researcher emailed the transcripts to the participants to allow them to make any corrections, deletions, or additions. Finally, emerging themes were coded at the end of the interview/focus group stage.

Structured and semi-structured questions were utilized in this study to allow the participants a wide range of opportunities to share their perceptions of the new teacher induction programs in which they participated. These questions also allowed the researcher to ask essential follow-up questions and to better understand their lived experiences and identify essential follow-up questions.

Data Management

Data from the survey questionnaire were collected via Google Forms and saved on the researcher's password-protected Google Suite. Data from focus group interviews were collected via Google Meet and saved on the researcher's password-protected Google Suite. Once the research project is completed, the researcher will delete all recordings of the focus group interviews. All electronic files will remain housed on the researcher's password-protected

Google Suite. Hardcopies of the transcripts and notes will remain in a locked cabinet of which the researcher is the only keyholder. The hardcopy transcripts will remain in the locked cabinet, and the electronic copies of all data will remain on the researcher's password-protected Google Suite for five years. At that point, the researcher will shred the transcripts with a paper shredder at the researcher's place of employment.

Data Analysis

Merriam and Tisdell (2017) describe the value of qualitative research by saying it “focuse[s] on discovery, insight, and understanding from the perspectives of those being studied [and] offers the greatest promise of making a difference in people's lives” (p. 1). To accomplish the goal of making a difference in people's lives, the researcher chose to use Cresswell's (2018) strategy that includes: (1) organizing the transcribed interviews, (2) reading the transcriptions for broad themes, (3) coding and categorizing the data, (4) describing the emerging themes, (5) representing qualitative narratives, and (6) interpreting the finding.

The transcriptions from the focus group interviews were read, highlighted, annotated, and categorized to determine emerging themes. Each interview transcript was read, coded, and annotated individually to determine emerging themes. Next, the researcher followed the same strategy with all transcriptions to determine broader themes. These readings aided in the creation of supporting narratives of the study.

After the themes were identified and the supporting narrative emerged, individual excerpts were lifted and assigned to the appropriate category. Steps 1-5 of Cresswell (2018) were repeated several times to ensure no themes were missed. Sub-themes were also identified throughout the process to assign them to the appropriate broader theme. Step 5, interpreting the findings, is discussed in Chapter Four.

Trustworthiness

This study provided a forum for new teachers from two rural county school systems who have participated in or are participating in a new teacher induction program the opportunity to express their perceptions of the support they received while in the program. The researcher utilized member checking to ensure the accuracy of the teachers' views on their experiences in the induction programs. Due to the distance involved with both systems in relation to the researcher, email and Google Meet were used to complete the process of member checking.

Given the qualitative nature of the study, the researcher had to rely on the participants being truthful in expressing their opinions. The study presupposed that participants had no reason to be untrustworthy while providing their lived experiences.

Validity in presenting the participants' perceptions was achieved via member checking in finding commonalities within the data. Ultimately, the researcher was committed to accurately retelling the stories expressed through the focus group interviews and the survey questionnaires. The researcher meticulously utilized the Cresswell (2018) six-step and transcription processes.

Ethical Considerations

As Vinson and Singer (2008) state, "it is ultimately up to individual researchers to ensure research practices are ethical" (p. 4). Consequently, the researcher turned to Vanclay et al. (2013) for ethical guidance. Vanclay et al. note that the two main principles for the ethical treatment of humans in research are respect for people and informed consent. It is from these two principles that all other principles flow. Those others include voluntary participation, right of withdrawal, no deception, right to check transcriptions, protection of anonymity and confidentiality, and data protection.

Therefore, the researcher took the following steps of ethical consideration:

1. Participation in the study was voluntary.
2. Each participant of the focus group interviews was notified of their right to withdraw from the study at any time.
3. All data from transcriptions and questionnaires were securely stored. The hard copies of the transcriptions were stored in a locked cabinet of which the researcher is the only keyholder. The electronic copies of the transcriptions and the survey data were stored on the researcher's password-protected Google Suite.
4. Participants' identities were kept confidential.
5. A concerted effort was made to prevent any undue burden or discomfort to the participants.
6. Due to the safeguards provided, a negligible level of risk was present for the participants.

Potential Contributions of the Research

Given the narrow nature of the study, the contributions of the research will mainly benefit the two rural Tennessee school districts involved in the study. As was noted earlier, qualitative research provides understanding and insight into the perspectives of those teachers who participated in new teacher induction programs (Merriam & Tisdell, 2013). Therefore, the two districts that were the subject of this study may be able to use the findings and recommendations from the study to make any necessary changes or to identify practices to continue. However, the study may also aid other school districts in implementing and/or improving their new teacher induction programs as the study will provide teacher perceptions about support. In a broader sense, the study has the potential to add to the limited research currently available on new teacher induction programs and teacher retention in general and rural settings in particular.

Chapter 4

Data Analysis and Findings

This qualitative study investigated perceptions of teachers who participated in two rural new teacher induction programs in Tennessee. As a result, the study relied heavily on focus groups to gather information. The benefits to focus group interviews are that they allow the researcher the opportunity to collect rich, in-depth information from the participants while promoting a safe environment for dialogue and the ability to observe the interactions (Then et al., 2014). In addition to the rich information, the researcher benefitted from the interaction among the participants and the validation of statements made by participants. To further enhance the information produced from the focus groups, the researcher also utilized a survey questionnaire to provide descriptive responses.

The qualitative responses were collected from a total of 54 participants (22 from System A and 32 from System B). From the pool of 54, a total of 13 participants were also part of the focus group interviews (four from System A and nine from System B). There were five focus groups in total (two for System A and three for System B). Each focus group ranged from two to five participants and lasted from 20 to 45 minutes in length. Both systems were located in rural Tennessee. The demographics of the two systems are represented in Table 1.

Table 1*School Demographics*

	Total Number of Schools	Total Student Population	Total Number of Teachers	Total Number of New Teachers
System A	7	4,112	237	68 ^a
System B	16	8,479	554	235 ^b

Note. The data in the table represents the 2020-21 school year.

^aThe total number of new teachers represents the new hires between 2018-2019 to 2020-2021.

^bThe total number of new teachers represents the new hires between 2016-2017 and 2020-2021.

Analysis of Data

By using the survey questionnaires, the researcher attempted to procure descriptive data from a wider group of teachers than participated in the focus groups. The questionnaire was distributed by each system's director of the induction programs to the teachers who had participated in or were participating in the program. Of the 62 eligible participants from System A, 22 completed the survey, a 35.5% completion rate. Of the 147 eligible participants from System B, 32 completed the survey, a 21.8% completion rate.

The researcher used Cresswell's (2018) six-step process for analyzing and interpreting the responses. Those steps include: (1) organizing the transcribed interviews, (2) reading the transcriptions for broad themes, (3) coding and categorizing the data, (4) describing the emerging themes, (5) representing qualitative narratives, and (6) interpreting the findings. Each focus group interview was recorded, transcribed, and coded.

Research Question

How do new teachers in two rural Tennessee school districts perceive support from participating in a new-teacher induction program?

Survey Questionnaire Items

Refer to Appendix B for the survey questionnaire items used in this study.

Focus Group Interview Questions (Appendix C)

Refer to Appendix C for the focus group interview questions used in this study.

The researcher used an inductive method to identify and categorize recurring themes from the responses. Further, responses were coded by the developing themes from the questionnaire surveys and the focus group interview responses. Each Google Meet session was uploaded to Sonix.ai, the voice-to-text transcription software. Each transcription was cross-checked using the sessions' notes to clarify or edit any erroneous information or unclear statements. Next, each participant received a copy of the transcription to improve accuracy and reliability. Once the participants had reviewed the transcriptions, the researcher read through the data to determine and categorize emerging themes. The global themes discovered in the study were (1) Mentor Support, (2) School-Level Administrative Support, and (3) District-Level Administrative Support. There was a total of 55 participants in the study. In the following data analysis and narrative, teacher participants are identified by the pseudonym of "Teacher" followed by an assigned system letter ("A" represents System A and "B" represents System B) and number (Teacher A1, Teacher A2, Teacher B1, Teacher B2, etc.).

Mentor Support

Providing a supportive mentor is a vital part of the new teacher induction program success (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2010; Ingersoll & Smith, 2004; Long, 2010;

Podolsky, 2016; Wong, 2005). A dominant theme that emerged from the responses was the perception of support from a mentor while teachers participated in the respective induction programs of this study. The descriptive information from the survey questionnaires produced the following results. As Table 2 demonstrates, there is a disparity between the two rural systems of the study regarding the assignment of mentor teachers. System A was more consistent in providing a mentor for their new teachers than was System B. 21 (95.5%) of the teachers from System A reported they were assigned a mentor, with 1 (4.5%) stating they were not assigned a mentor. 22 (69.75%) of the teachers from System B reported they were assigned a mentor, with 10 (31.5%) reporting no assigned mentor.

Designating one's mentor often appeared in the System B data. As Table 2 details, 5 (50%) of new teachers who were not assigned a mentor (15.6% of all respondents) stated they found their own mentors. Delay was an issue for Teacher B2. "I was about a year and a half into teaching in the district before I was officially assigned a mentor teacher. By that point, I had already chosen people as my mentors." Teacher B3 was not assigned a mentor. She added, "I have actually tapped into both our librarian and our art teacher for help. But, I was not assigned a mentor." Finally, Teacher B4 said, "I mainly sought out professionals on my own within the school and people that I'd encountered in my student teaching."

It is essential to look within the numbers of teachers who reported being assigned a mentor as the 69.8% may be misleading. For instance, Teacher B2's story is revealing. Teacher B2 stated, "I was about a year and a half into teaching in the district before I was officially assigned a mentor teacher. By that time, I had already chosen people for myself that I decided were going to mentor me." In other words, even though Teacher B2 is one of the 69.8% who reported being assigned a mentor, given the delay in that assignment, he had already found a

mentor on his own. Teacher B2's example can indicate that other teachers who received a mentor may also have had a delay or just found a teacher with whom he/she was more comfortable as a mentor.

Table 2

Mentor Assignment Component

	Assigned a Mentor	No Assigned a Mentor	No Assigned Mentor, Found One on Own	No Assigned Mentor, No One Served in that Role
System A	21 (95.5%)	1 (4.5%)	N/A	1 (100%)
System B	22 (69.8%)	10 (31.3%)	5 (50%)	5 (50%)

Based on the number of teachers assigned a mentor during the induction process, 14 (66.7%) of the participants from System A stated their mentor was assigned by their school-level administrator. Furthermore, 21 (100%) of the participants in System A reported that their mentor was located within their school. For System B, 17 (77.3%) participants stated their mentor was assigned by their school-level administrator. In addition, 21 (95.2%) reported their mentor was located within their school. The mentor data for the two systems are located in Table 3.

Table 3

Mentor Support Data

	District Assigned Mentor	School Assigned Mentor	Mentor Located in District	Mentor Located in School
System A	7 (33.3%)	14 (66.7%)	0 (0%)	21 (100%)
System B	5 (22.7%)	17 (77.3%)	1 (4.8%)	21 (95.2%)

Table 4 details the frequency participants reported meeting with their mentor. For System A, 15 (68.2%) participants reported meeting with their mentor “about once a month,” while 2 (9.1%) noted meeting “about once a day.” Conversely, only 1 (4.5%) reported he/she “rarely met together” with his/her mentor. For System B, 5 (22.7%) participants noted meeting with their mentor “about once a month,” and 3 (13.6%) said they met “about once a week”; however, 9 (40.9%) reported meeting daily, and only 1 (4.5%) stated he/she “rarely met together.”

Table 4

Reported Frequency of Meeting with Mentors

	About Once a Day	About Once a Week	About Once Every Two Weeks	About Once a Month	About Once a Semester	Rarely Met Together
System A	2 (9.1%)	1 (4.5%)	1 (4.5%)	15 (68.2%)	1 (4.5%)	1 (4.5%)
System B	9 (40.9%)	3 (13.6%)	2 (9%)	5 (22.7%)	2 (9%)	1 (4.5%)

The study participants were asked to assess their perceptions of support from their mentors with the prompt, “I am/was comfortable approaching my mentor to ask for needed support.” The survey questionnaire showed that the System A teachers felt comfortable asking their mentors for support. When asked about their comfort level in approaching their mentor to ask for support, the teachers in System A reported that 15 (68.2%) “Strongly Agree” and 2 (9.1%) “Agree” with that statement. Meanwhile, only 3 (4.5%) of the teachers “Disagree” or “Strongly Disagree” with the statement about their comfort level in asking for support. Similarly, System B teachers felt comfortable going to their mentor and asking for support. Responding to the same prompt on comfort level asking for support from the mentor, 20 (62.5%) marked “Strongly Agree” and 5 (15.6%) marked “Agree” with the statement. Whereas 2 (6.3%)

participants responded “Strongly Disagree” they were not comfortable asking for support, and 5 (15.6%) stated the prompt “Did Not Apply” as they were not assigned a mentor and did not seek one out. Table 5 displays the results of the prompts regarding perceptions of mentor support.

Table 5

I Am/Was Comfortable Approaching My Mentor to Ask for Needed Support.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Did Not Apply
System A	15 (68.2%)	2 (9.1%)	1 (4.5%)	2 (9%)	2 (9%)
System B	20 (62.5%)	5 (15.6%)	0 (0%)	2 (6.3%)	5 (15.6%)

In response to the prompt, “I felt/feel supported by my mentor during my new-teacher induction program,” a majority of teachers in both systems perceived that their mentor supported them. Thirty-one (57.4%) participants in the study marked “strongly agree” that they felt supported by their mentor, while 9 (16.7%) marked “agree,” 3 (5.6%) marked “disagree,” 2 (3.7%) reported “strongly disagree,” and 9 (16.6%) reported the prompt “did not apply.”

Disaggregating by system, 13 (63.6%) and 2 (13.2%) of the System A participants felt supported by their mentor throughout their time in the induction program. Conversely, only 2 (9.1%) and 1 (4.5%) disagreed with the statement that they felt supported by their mentor. For System B, 17 (53.1%) and 6 (18.8%) participants felt their mentor supported them throughout the induction program. Only 2 (6.3%) disagreed with the prompt; 7 (18.8%) of System B teachers stated the prompt “Did Not Apply” as they did not have a mentor. Table 6 depicts the data for the above-mentioned prompt.

Table 6

I Feel/Felt Supported by My Mentor During My New Teacher Induction Program.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Did Not Apply
System A	13 (63.6%)	2 (13.2%)	1 (4.5%)	2 (9.1%)	2 (9.1%)
System B	17 (53.1%)	6 (13.2%)	2 (6.3%)	0 (0%)	7 (18.8%)
Total	31 (57.4%)	9 (16.7%)	3 (5.6%)	2 (3.7%)	9 (16.7%)

Three sub-themes emerged during the focus group interviews for the global theme of mentor support. The sub-themes were relationships, communications, and planning.

Relationships with Mentor

A recurring sub-theme that appeared in the coding from both systems' responses was the relationship of the mentors and the new teachers. The types of relationships varied considerably in the responses. The range was from no relationship (evidenced by the 4.5% of System A and 31.1% of System B who reported not being assigned a mentor in Table 2) to daily meetings and close friendships found in the interview data. For those with fewer contacts or support, a typical response from the participants in the focus group interviews was how the mentors were available for questions and assistance. These were teachers who did not have much contact with their mentor; however, they felt they could go to the mentor if the new teachers needed to ask a question or seek advice. For instance, Teacher A3 said, "anytime I have a question, [my mentor] is there." Furthermore, Teacher A5 concurred with Teacher A3, saying, "I know I could approach her if needed." Teacher B19 reported, "she was just available to talk to whenever I needed to ask her questions."

While the superficial relationship was evident in both systems in the study, there was more of a prominent perception of a superficial relationship among the participants from System

B. Support for this perception is presented in Table 2 with 10 (31.3%) stating they were either not assigned a mentor or had to find one on their own. It is further evidenced in Table 6, where 9 (25.1%) of the respondents stated they either did not have a mentor or did not feel supported by their assigned mentor. Conversely, 15 (81.8%) of the participants in System A marked “agree” or “strongly agree” with the statement that they “felt supported by their mentor teacher during the induction program,” also noted in Table 6.

One participant from System B appeared to verbalize what several participants felt about a shallow relationship with their mentor. Teacher B2 discussed that he was assigned a mentor after finding a mentor on his own accord.

[She] was assigned as my mentor; however, I had kind of picked out my own mentor and had relied on her for most of the questions I had. I did feel as though I could ask my assigned mentor any questions, and she’d be willing to answer. That being said, I do not remember asking [my assigned mentor] many questions, if any.

It was not that the assigned mentor for Teacher B2 was unsupportive or incapable; it was about relationships with other colleagues. As Teacher B2 further noted, “I had found other kinds of stronger relationships and people that I maybe more implicitly trusted than the mentor I was eventually assigned.”

For the participants who had a significant relationship, the participants often praised their mentor. This perception of solid support from their mentors was evident in both systems in the study, as has previously been discussed in Table 6. For many teachers in the study, the relationship became personal and professional. Teacher B5 sang her mentor’s praises.

She's just all-around a good person. I mean, if you need a laugh, she's going to make you laugh. And, if you need one of those good mom hugs that when your mom's not there, she'll give you one.

Teacher B9 further effused praise regarding the personal relationship she had with her mentor. "It was a great experience, and she helped me in every way possible. In addition to professional help, she was also someone to vent to and to cry on her shoulder." Teacher B5 added, "[my mentor] is very supportive of me. She calls me on the weekends to check on me if things go wrong throughout the week. Or, she will text me to see if I'm doing okay." While responding to the prompt regarding support from his/her mentor, Teacher B26 wrote, "my mentor provided moral support for me which made my transition into the profession so much easier. Simply having somebody whom I could ask simple questions to was a major help." Furthermore, Teacher B20 wrote, "I had a really tough first year, so my mentor's positivity and encouragement helped more than anything. Without her and the rest of the team, I don't think I would've made it through that year." From System A, Teacher A5 said, "the support and encouragement provided and the excitement shown by the mentors for the new teachers in the building has made the transition from a different system and state very easy." Teacher A17 summed up the feelings of several participants when she said,

My mentor is very approachable and easy to talk to. She gives support and advice in a caring manner. She checks in regularly and ensures I have everything I need to be successful in all areas. She's provided help in these areas: Beginning of school help (getting over the learning curve of being a new teacher), parent communication help, student behavior management help, collecting and keeping student data, and so much more.

Several participants reported that their mentors built relationships with them and aided in building relationships between the mentee and the other people in the school building. Teacher A4 said, “I think the biggest thing [the mentors] helped me with is being able to make connections with the faculty that teach the same courses that I do.” Teacher B6 stated, “[my mentor] was really my lifeline emotionally and socially.” She further mentioned that her mentor “went and introduced me to a bunch of people at the schools.”

The rate of meetings between the mentor and the mentee for both systems varied considerably among the participants. Several participants discussed or reported meeting with their mentor daily. Teacher B6 said, “[the mentor] was the kind of person I went to for everything. I know we weren’t supposed to meet every single day, but we did.” Teacher B18 reported, “I get daily encouragement.”

Communication with Mentor

Communication has shown to be an integral component of the mentoring process (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2010; Ingersoll & Smith, 2004; Long, 2010; Podolsky, 2016; Wei et al., 2010; Wong, 2005). In System A, communication with a mentor appears to be consistent and begins when a teacher is hired. As Teacher A3 said, just as soon as she was hired, she received an email from her mentor that read, “Hey, I’m [mentor name]. I’m assigned as your mentor.” She continued, “[my mentor] came and took me on a tour of the school. She gave me information on the school. She answered a lot of my questions.” Teacher A4 concurred when discussing the immediate mentor communication when he said, “I’ve been very impressed with [System A]. It was like I got hired, and I was given notice of exactly when the new teacher academy would be.”

Furthermore, in the discussion about mentor communication, it became clear that the mentors of System A were consistent in remaining in communication with their mentees throughout the program. It also became clear that many new teachers received pertinent and timely communications. Teacher A5, a first-year teacher, remarked, “she [mentor] was particularly helpful with the beginning of the year preparation and explaining to me how my school functions and the quirks of the school.” Teacher A3 remarked, “we have monthly meetings like one Monday out of every month. At these meetings, we go over different sections of the TEAM rubric.” Teacher A17 spoke to the constant communication she received from her mentor. “My mentor is very approachable and easy to talk to. She gives support and advice in a caring manner. She checks in regularly and ensures I have everything I need to be successful in all areas.” Teacher A3 said, “[her mentor] keeps us updated on all important things going on in the school and system.” Several teachers from System A mentioned they received electronic communications via email and texts with their mentors in addition to face-to-face communications.

An exception in System A was Teacher A2. This veteran teacher was hired mid-year of 2020. She taught for about nine weeks when COVID caused the system to shut down. She did participate in the three-day new teacher orientation at the start of the next school year; she was not appointed a mentor. However, she sought out assistance as a new teacher to the system.

I have just really learned to advocate for myself, and I am one of those firm believers that the only bad question is the question not asked. So for me, it was just a matter of geographically changing jobs. Therefore, I sought out the right people to find answers to my questions. Ultimately, I turned to the [department] chair or my assigned principal.

When pressed further and asked if she would have preferred to have been assigned a mentor, Teacher A2 plainly stated, “if I was [sic] in a classroom setting like [Teacher A3], then I would have preferred to have a direct mentor assigned.” However, she went on to say, “with my role being a [non-general education teacher], then no.”

Communications did not appear in the data for System B as often as it did for System A; however, a few teachers did report regular communications with their mentors. For example, Teacher B5 said, “[my mentor’s] very supportive. She calls or texts me quite often to check up on me.” Similar to System A, several participants in System B noted that their mentors contacted them electronically.

Planning with Mentor

The final sub-theme that emerged from the data was the mentor helping the new teachers with lesson planning and unit planning. Teacher A1 discussed how he wanted to make changes to what had been done in the past at the school.

I do a lot of programming due to the nature of my subject area that I teach. And, so with her being there, [my mentor] was here to help out. She was very, very open to new ideas and to listen.

A commonality with both system participants was how mentors assisted the new teachers in preparing to teach in their classrooms and for administrative observations. Teacher A23 reported, “she came to observe me various times to give suggestions in classroom management, etc. She even checked over my lesson plan for an observation and made some great suggestions to score higher in areas.” In regards to observations, Teacher A4 said, “the mentors have been a big help with our observations. They spent quite a bit of time teaching me how the rubric would work with our evaluation system.” Teacher A2 summed up the feelings of many participants by

saying, “from an educational standpoint, [mentors] offered targeted assistance for classroom management, instructional strategies, and provided guidance/feedback on the TEAM rubric and evaluation results.” Teacher A18 agreed with those sentiments when she wrote, “my mentor assists me in all formal observations. She looks through my lesson plans and gives feedback accordingly.”

The participants from System B reported similar experiences with their mentors regarding lesson and unit planning. Teacher B31 wrote, “my mentor is teaching the same content and grade area I am. So, she has helped me with all lesson planning.” This type of response was typical among those who participated in the questionnaire survey. Teacher B24 concurred in her response, writing, “[my mentor] has helped me with lesson plans and coming up with new ideas. Also, she has helped and supported me by providing different ideas for classroom management and on how to come up with solid lesson plans.” Help with lesson planning was a response that appeared often in the data from teachers in System B.

However, some of the participants in System B did not perceive their mentors as supportive and helpful in planning lessons during their first year of teaching. Teacher B4, who was not assigned a mentor and never found one with whom to work, stated, “I wish I’d had somebody to help me out instead of having to make it on my own.” She continued, “I didn’t know the expectations for lesson planning and wished I had someone to kind of give me feedback.” Teacher B8, who was assigned a mentor, bluntly said, “if I’m gonna be honest, I don’t think the person that was mentoring me knew how to do it. I don’t think she received anything to go on to be a mentor.” Teacher B32 had a similar experience as Teacher B8 in writing, “[my mentor] was little, to no help to me at all. He was also not very approachable at all.”

School-Level Administrative Support

Providing administrative support for new teachers is an integral part of a successful new teacher induction program (Jacobson et al., 2020; Prilleltensky et al., 2016; Ronfeldt & McQueen, 2017). A prevalent theme that emerged from the responses was the perception of support from school administration while teachers participated in the respective induction programs of this study. The survey questionnaire results suggest that new teachers in each system felt their school-level administrators supported them while they were participating in the induction programs. The descriptive data from the survey questionnaires produced the following results.

As Table 7 demonstrates, there is little difference between the perception of support teachers new to their respective systems felt from their school-level administrators. Furthermore, both systems had a large percentage of participants agree they felt their administrators were supportive. In System A, 12 (54%) of the teachers reported they “strongly agree,” and 6 (27.3%) of the teachers reported they “agree” with the statement, “I feel/felt supported by my school-level administration during the new teacher induction program.” Meanwhile, only 2 (9.1%) of the respondents “disagree” and 2 (9.1%) of the respondents “strongly disagree” with the statement.

Similarly in System B, 16 (50%) of the teachers reported they “strongly agree,” and 11 (34.4%) of the teachers reported they “agree” with the aforementioned statement. Conversely, 3 (9.4%) of the respondents “disagree” and 2 (6.3%) of the respondents “strongly disagree” with the statement regarding perceptions of support from school-level administration.

Table 7

I Feel/Felt Supported by My School-Level Administration During the New Teacher Induction Program.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
System A	12 (54.5%)	6 (27.3%)	2 (9.1%)	2 (9.1%)
System B	16 (50%)	11 (34.4%)	3 (9.4%)	2 (6.3%)

The results from the survey questionnaire suggest that the respondents from both systems felt comfortable approaching their school-level administration to ask for support. Table 8 shows the results from the survey.

The prompt “I feel/felt comfortable approaching my administrator(s) to ask for needed support” produced identical results for System A as the prompt “I feel/felt supported by my school level administration during the new teacher induction program” reported in Table 7. Consequently, the overwhelming majority of responses either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement. However, for System B, the results, although still largely positive, were markedly different from the results shown in Table 7. The results showed that fewer of the respondents, 16 (40.6%), “strongly agree” while more, 14 (43.8%), of the respondents “agree” with the statement that they felt comfortable seeking support from their administrator(s). Consequently, a higher percentage of the respondents reported they did not feel comfortable seeking support than had reported feeling supported by administrators noted in Table 7 – 3 (9.4%) “disagree” and 2 (6.3%) “strongly disagree” compared to 2 (6.3%) “disagree” and 2 (6.3%) “strongly disagree.” Despite the slight differences found in Table 8, the data suggest that the new teachers felt comfortable seeking support from their school-level administrators.

Table 8

I Feel/Felt Comfortable Approaching My Administrator(s) to Ask for Needed Support.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
System A	12 (54.5%)	6 (27.3%)	2 (9.1%)	2 (9.1%)
System B	16 (40.6%)	14 (43.8%)	3 (9.4%)	2 (6.3%)

Two sub-themes emerged during the focus group interviews for the global theme of school-level administrative support. The sub-themes were relationships and communications.

Relationship with School-Level Administration

The dominant sub-theme was the relationship between the school-level administration and the new teachers. As Table 7 and Table 8 detail, the participants from both systems in the study perceived they were supported by their administration and felt comfortable asking their administrators for support. However, the feelings many stated about their administrators went beyond a comfort level of support. Several participants discussed a strong relationship with their administrators. Teacher A2 praised her administration. She said, “every morning I am greeted by one of our administrators, sometimes by all five of our administrators.” She noted how welcoming and open they are to the teachers. “We stop and talk to each other.” She continued, “[the administrators] even had one of the other teachers come in to talk to me about my department.” Later she noted, “they’re just super supportive. They know about your family and your day.” Teacher A2 summed up her feelings succinctly with, “you feel like you’re part of that family.”

Teacher A1 (from a different school than Teacher A2) also spoke of his admiration of the school-level administrators for whom he worked. “I can always go with them for questions, and I

always got answers instantly.” Similarly, Teacher A4 spoke highly of her administration. “I was never put off. They stopped and helped me immediately and made me feel like I was important.” Finally, when asked to provide specific details in how they perceived their relationship with their administrators, Teacher A14 wrote,

My administrators are extremely helpful and were especially in my first year of teaching. Honestly, any issue that I had, I would go to them for a solution. I moved from elementary to middle school when I came to this district, and they really helped me navigate how to teach and handle middle school students.

Not all participants from System A felt as though they had a relationship with, nor felt support from their school-level administrators as new teachers. Teacher A3, who had to miss the start of the year due to circumstances, said, “I just didn’t have much contact with my administrators.” She went on to say, “while my mentor was super helpful, my principals were absent. And, since I’ve been back, they haven’t done much to support me.” Teacher A12 had a similar experience with her mentor and administrators. She wrote, “I received most of my support from my mentors. I wouldn’t approach my principals as they always seem extremely busy.” Neither Teacher A22 nor Teacher A15 felt supported by their administrative team. Teacher A22 summed it up for both teachers by plainly reporting, “I don’t feel that I received very much support from my school-level administrators.”

The majority of the participants in System B also reported developing a solid relationship with school-level administrators. Teacher B4 talked about how difficult it was to be a first-year teacher and teach Kindergarten virtually. She spoke of how her school-level administrators were “there for her.” She continued, “they were very available and ready to help me. I went to them often, and they checked on me often. I really felt important to them.” Teacher B5, who started

teaching the same year and under the same virtual circumstances but in a different school than Teacher B4, said of her administration, “he’s been very supportive of just checking in on me, not only as a teacher but also personally to make sure that I’m okay and not getting burned out.”

One participant from System B spoke very highly of her relationship with her administrator. When asked to discuss her perceptions of her relationship with her administration, she stated, “I’ve just got to brag on her.” She went on to say, “she would just come in the room to check on me. She was always helpful, knowledgeable, and patient. I mean, I couldn’t have asked for a better principal.”

One teacher from System B wrote about how her administration took part in the induction program alongside the other teachers. Teacher B12 felt a strong connection with her school-level administration.

At least one administrator was available during the training to answer any/all questions we had. In addition, they participated during the program alongside us. Lastly, they were readily available with information pertaining to the upcoming school year, and they encouraged us to use each other as a resource. If they were uncertain of an answer, they would get us an answer by the end of the program.

Moving down the relationship spectrum, several teachers from System B discussed how they had a positive but not strong relationship with their school-level administrators. Teacher B1 said she was “by and large, left alone.” She continued, “I do know when there’s something that comes up, and we need to reach out; I feel like the administrator is responsive.” In addition, Teacher B26 reported, “administration was always willing to answer questions and help when they can.” Some participants felt closer in their relationships with some school-level

administrators than others. Teacher B1 admitted that “some administrators are definitely more present than others.”

The teachers who perceived their relationship with their administrators to be superficial noted a lack of contact with their principals along with disingenuous actions from their administrators. Teacher B2 said, “I was not really known by my administrators.” He qualified his statement by saying, “[my administrators] talked about having a relationship with us; however, it was more like pretending to be close. Those types of relationships feel weird. Feels a little kind of icky.” Teacher B3 found it challenging to build a relationship with her administrators at her school as they have been absent. She stated, “it’s been very hard to even find administrators when we need them.” She went on to say, “I think that they have good hearts. I have no doubt they care about us, but the reality is they are not here, or they haven’t been here, and they’ve not been available.”

Teacher B6 and Teacher B8 concurred with that assessment in dealing with their administrators. For example, Teacher B6 said, “I think [my administrator] came to my classroom twice the whole year, maybe once.” She perceived that she was not worth the principal’s time since “[my administrator] doesn’t have time to come in and check to see what I’m doing in my classroom or check on me.” When discussing her relationship with her administration, Teacher B22 wrote, “I think I met with my principal three times that whole year (including observation meetings). Administrators barely visited my classroom. I rarely felt supported that year.”

Teacher B30 and Teacher B32 also reported this lack of relationship with administrators.

Teacher B6 appeared to sum up the feelings of several participants by pointing out she missed having a personal relationship with her administrators.

This was especially true with the emotional aspect of teaching. There were so many challenges my first year, and I felt like I really needed that connection with an administrator. I needed the kind of connection where I would be able to share how I was feeling and like share all of my doubts of being a first-year teacher. I never really got that.

Unfortunately, this sentiment was not relegated to Teacher B6. Teacher B32 was very blunt in saying that her “administration did not respond to emails, texts, or phone calls.” She continued by saying the only way to get any “information from [her] admin[istration] was to ‘catch’ them in person and hope you got an answer.”

Communication with School-Level Administration

The other major sub-theme regarding support from the school-level administration was communication between the school-level administration and the new teacher. Studies have shown that one effective way to aid in retaining teachers in rural schools is for the school administrators to reach out and communicate early and often with newly hired teachers (Lowe, 2006). Teacher A4 discussed experiencing just that and how special and welcoming it made him feel to be a part of the faculty. He talked about meeting with the principal and being introduced to an assistant principal on the day of his interview. He said the principal took him on a tour of the school and talked about the different programs they had in place. After he was hired, Teacher A4 described the first meeting with all administrators in the school. He was impressed with the effort each took to meet with him.

But, to have all of those people present at that first meeting and for them to introduce themselves and say, hey, here are all the things that I am in charge of, if you need help,

come see me about these things. There was nothing left to guess about. They took care of all of that, which was a huge help after the meeting was over.

Teacher A5 had a similar experience with her principal. As soon as she was hired, her principal “gave me a tour of the school” to get her acclimated to the school’s layout and the general climate. She went on to say that her principal went out of his way to make her “feel less intimidated about being in a new building with new people.” Teacher A19 wrote about how communications with her administration are constant, focused, and beneficial. She wrote about how her administrators “would come watch my class/teaching frequently” and would follow up and “provide feedback and suggestions on things that I could do better or work on.” The administrators even had “monthly meetings one-on-one where they were able to discuss things that I was struggling with.” Teacher B14 wrote about the constant communications from the administration at her school. She wrote that her “assistant principal in charge of curriculum meets with [new teachers] regularly.” During those meetings, the assistant principal provides help in working towards “team harmony” and improving “class content.” She “offers quality advice and insight every time we meet.”

The data from System B did not present as many examples of communications between the school-level administrators and the new teachers; there were a couple of examples of note. Teacher B13 wrote that her administrators conduct “weekly check-ins” that result in “positive feedback from walk-throughs and other positive interactions.” Teacher 33B responded to the survey questionnaire by saying her administrator “always checked on me.”

Few participants from either system in the study reported poor or insufficient communications with their administrators. One teacher from System A said she would have liked important information to have been more timely. Furthermore, a few teachers in System B

reported the lack of “check-ins” as a concern. As one of those teachers said, “I’d love to know that my admin[istration] values me as a teacher in this building.”

District-Level Administrative Support

A prevalent theme that emerged from the data was the perception of support from the district level while teachers participated in the respective induction programs of this study. The survey questionnaire results suggest that new teachers in each system felt their district-level administrators supported them while they were participating in the induction programs.

The descriptive data from the survey questionnaires produced the following results. For System A, 20 (90.9%) of the respondents perceived they were supported by their district-level administrators, with 2 (9%) stating that they did not feel supported by the district-level administrators. The respondents from System B also overwhelmingly perceived support from their district-level administrators at 26 (82.2%). However, only 5 (15.6%) of the System B respondents responded with “strongly agree” compared to 11 (50%) of System A responding with “strongly agree.” Furthermore, a more significant percentage of System B, 6 (18.8%), did not perceive support from their district-level administrators. The results of the survey questionnaire are demonstrated in Table 9.

Table 9

I Feel/Felt Supported by My District-Level Administrator(s) During the New Teacher Induction Program.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
System A	11 (50%)	9 (40.9%)	1 (4.5%)	1 (4.5%)
System B	5 (15.6%)	21 (65.6%)	4 (12.5%)	2 (6.3%)

Table 10 represents the results of the prompt asking if the respondents felt comfortable asking their district-level administrators for support. Once again, 20 (90.9%) of the respondents from System A reported they “felt comfortable approaching my district-level administrators for needed support.” However, a more significant percentage marked “strongly agree” to this prompt than did to their district-level administrators’ perception of feeling supported. Meanwhile, the same 2 (9%) responded negatively to seeking support from their district leaders. Furthermore, the respondents from System B also overwhelmingly responded that they felt comfortable seeking assistance from their district-level administrators. However, unlike their perception of support as reported in Table 9, fewer teachers felt comfortable seeking assistance from their district-level leaders. This comfort level was especially true for those who responded with “strongly agree.” The results were 4 (12.5%) of System B participants marked “strongly agree,” and 20 (62.5%) marked “agree” to the prompt, “I feel comfortable approaching my district-level leaders for needed support.” Meanwhile, a total of 8 (25.1%) of the respondents from System B responded that they did not feel comfortable seeking support from their district leaders.

Table 10

I Feel/Felt Comfortable Approaching My District-Level Administrator(s) to Ask for Needed Support.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
System A	12 (54.5%)	8 (26.4%)	1 (4.5%)	1 (4.5%)
System B	4 (12.5%)	20 (62.5%)	6 (18.8%)	2 (6.3%)

The emerging sub-themes from the data were professional development training and Teacher Educator Accelerator Model (TEAM) rubric training.

Support from District-Level Administrators with Professional Development Training

The participants from System B often reported about the three-day in-service training for the new teachers before school officially began. Only one teacher from System B reported not participating in the pre-school new teacher training. The participants consistently reported meeting their mentors and administrators, learning about the TEAM rubric and how to use it properly, and orientation on new job clerical information. Moreover, many participants praised the district-level new teacher induction program leader.

Teacher A12 reported participating in “a new teacher in-service for 3 days.” She found it very beneficial and was a “great way to inform us about our jobs.” Adjectives that appeared throughout the survey questionnaire results and the focus group interviews in describing the in-service training prior to the start of school were “beneficial,” “super helpful,” “intense,” and “well-planned.”

In addition to being made aware of system wide procedures, the teachers in System B discussed the value of meeting with the district’s lead teachers, administration, and all the other new teachers. Teacher A6 provided a typical response when she said how “valuable it was” to be “provided opportunities for new teachers to meet with administrators and lead teachers from our schools and get to know one another.” Teacher A19 agreed with the benefit of meeting other new teachers. She said she loved having “one-on-one conversations” with other new teachers during the orientation and the monthly meetings throughout the year.

The participants from System B also reported a beginning of the year new teacher in-service training; however, there were fewer instances in the data from System B as there were from System A. The teachers who reported participating in the beginning of the year new teacher

in-service consistently mentioned *The First Days of School* by Harry Wong book study and learning about the district level staff and orientation paperwork.

Teacher B2 stated that he felt the system provided a “fairly healthy level of support” as a new teacher. In that same focus group interview, Teacher B3 said she was on an “island by herself” with little support from the district staff. She further stated that she received “little professional development” and added that she “would not even know who to call if [she] needed help.” Teacher B2 responded that he could see why Teacher B3 perceives such lack of support. He said the information was presented far too fast when discussing the new hire orientation paperwork, especially for those new to full-time employment.

I mentioned being a fairly new adult who is working my first real job with any kind of salary and thinking about 401k stuff for the first time. There was a lot of that kind of stuff packed into those three days, and they were one right after another. It was overwhelming for me.

Teacher B2 finished up with possibly “providing a little bit of time” to think through what he may need for his future and discussing things over with his wife. Teacher B7 perceived the orientation paperwork the same as Teacher B2. B7 reported that all of that paperwork “was just thrown at me all at once.” Along those same lines, Teacher B8 pointed out that the beginning of the year in-service was a lot of “one person after another in front of us providing information quickly.” Teacher B9 stated that the speed of the presentations “was just almost information overload.”

Teacher B6 represented several teachers from System B who, like their colleagues in System A, appreciated the opportunity to get to know other first-year teachers in the district during the beginning of the year in-service training for new teachers. “It was nice to get to meet

the other new teachers.” She said it was helpful to know who was “in the same boat” as she was and to whom she could turn throughout the year for support. Teacher B5 appreciated that the beginning of the year in-service training “gave us that ease and comfort” when she stepped into her classroom. Unfortunately, several of the teachers from System B reported that the meeting at the beginning of the year was helpful; however, that was the last meeting they had with anyone from the district level or with the other new teachers. Many wanted to continue meeting with their peers. Teacher B5 lamented that she had never met the other new teachers throughout the school year. She wanted to know, “what are other grade level teachers doing at other schools? How can we support one another? What are they doing that may work in my classroom?” Teacher B6 added she would like to have met with other new teachers throughout the year as she “felt like we were all kind of drowning separately.”

The consensus from the System B participants was that the book study of Harry Wong’s *The First Days of School* was beneficial. Phrases such as “valuable in providing new ideas,” “assisting with setting up my classroom,” “help with classroom management,” and “crucial my first year” were used throughout the data when discussing the book study. However, as Teacher A13 pointed out, the Wong book study was more aligned with first-year teachers and not veteran teachers new to the system. She said, “I felt like this was a waste of my time. I was on year five coming into [System B], and felt like I was lumped in with first-year teachers and being given information I didn’t really need.”

Finally, regarding new teacher training, a common need expressed by participants from both systems in the study was for training in technical areas (i.e., Skyward, Google Classroom, Canvas, PowerSchool) and training in how to communicate with parents.

Support with the TEAM Rubric

While both System A and System B participants discussed training they received on the TEAM rubric, System A teachers constantly brought up their training on the rubric. Teacher A3 reported receiving “a lot of help with the TEAM rubric.” When pressed for specifics, she said the district leader “broke [the TEAM rubric] down into its parts” and spent time on each part. The leader also “gave us examples” for what an observer will be looking during an evaluation. Teacher A14 provided more details on what was learned during TEAM training. She reported having learned “a tremendous amount about the teaching craft.” She further pointed out that the district administrator who led the training “was a gifted teacher who taught many skills by example.” Teacher A1 added that the district administrator broke the “TEAM rubric down into great detail.” She also said that given her experience in other Tennessee school systems, this is “not a common practice.” She continued, “we actually did a lot of application with the rubric and even wrote lesson plans.” Teacher A1 finished by saying the administrator provided “detailed and immediate feedback,” which she found “extremely helpful.” Teacher A16 further reported that the TEAM training did not end with the new teacher in-service. She noted that the district-level administrator provided training throughout the teacher’s first year of teaching for any teacher who wished to participate. Teacher A12 spoke of her time spent in the TEAM rubric training. She found it “most beneficial” as it gave her “very specific ways to improve my teaching.” Teacher A10 added that the “feedback from evaluations helped me adapt my instruction to better meet the needs of my students.”

As previously mentioned, TEAM training at the beginning of the year new teacher in-service training was beneficial for many in System B. However, the training was mentioned less often than it was for System A. Teacher B24, while listing the support she received from district-

level administrators, noted she learned “all the information I needed to know as a new teacher for TEAM evaluations.” Teacher B10 simply wrote that the “district introduced me to the TEAM rubric.” While speaking in general and not specifically to the TEAM rubric, Teacher B10 said that the beginning of the year’s new teacher training was “helpful to understand(ing) the evaluation process.”

Summary of Findings

Chapter Four summarized the findings extracted from this study. The global themes presented in the data are (1) Mentor Support, (2) School-Level Administrative Support, and (3) District-Level Administrative Support. Mentor Support and the accompanying sub-themes were coded 109 times; School-Level Administrative Support and the accompanying sub-themes were coded 101 times, and (3) District-Level Administrative Support and the accompanying sub-themes were coded 91 times. The narrative, excerpts, and tables provide a detailed and comprehensive description of the qualitative data.

Chapter 5

Summary of Findings, Discussions, Recommendations, and Conclusions

Research has shown that teachers who are new to the profession are less effective in improving their students' learning than their experienced colleagues (Murnane & Phillips, 1981; Raymond, Fletcher, & Luque, 2001; Rivkin, Hanushek, & Kain, 2001). Furthermore, research has also shown that teachers with less than five years of experience are more likely to leave the classroom than their more experienced counterparts (Boe et al., 2008; Goldring et al., 2014; Ingersoll et al., 2018; Norton, 2015). To combat the trends of ineffective teachers and new teacher attrition, Carver-Thomas and Hammond-Darling (2017) encourage school systems to implement effective new teacher induction programs. This study aimed to investigate the perceptions of support of teachers who participated in two rural Tennessee school districts' new teacher induction programs. The modality of the study was qualitative. This qualitative approach allowed teachers to share their perceptions concerning the support they received as new teachers. As an overall approach, Chapter Five is written through the researcher's interpretive lens; the interpretive process is accompanied by an analysis of the findings in the teachers' responses.

The research question for this study was: How do new teachers in two rural Tennessee school districts perceive support from participating in a new-teacher induction program?

The qualitative information was drawn from focus group interviews and survey questions with teachers who participated in their systems' respective new teacher induction programs. The researcher selected focus groups and surveys because of the possibility of generating dynamic group interaction and rich descriptive responses, thus improving the quality of the information (Then et al., 2014). The focus group and the survey questionnaire participants included teachers from rural school districts in Tennessee with different years of teaching experience, age, gender,

and level of teacher effectiveness. Once all of the interview responses were transcribed, and surveys completed, organizing and coding the responses was used to determine the study's emerging global themes and accompanying sub-themes (Creswell, 2013).

Summary of Findings

The study's findings discussed in this section present the identified themes from the collected responses. Chapter 4 of this study includes the analysis and presentation of data that support these described themes. These findings result from the collected and transcribed responses of each study participant.

Themes Regarding Mentor Support

A prevailing theme in the responses on mentor support was relationships. Furthermore, the responses on relationships showed a continuum of support that spanned from a significant relationship with their mentor to a superficial relationship with their mentor to a non-existent relationship with their mentor or no mentor. The responses indicate that the more contact between the mentor and the mentee, the stronger relationship between the two is perceived.

The information provided by teachers who reported having no mentor varied considerably from not caring they did not have a mentor to wishing they had been provided a mentor. A veteran teacher new to her school system said she was "fine without a mentor." She further added that she "preferred to figure things out on her own and didn't really need a mentor." Meanwhile, one first-year teacher lamented that she "really wished she had a mentor" because she was so new to teaching that she "really struggled" that first year.

Several participants reported that they had a mentor; however, the relationship with the mentor was minimal or non-existent. While they did have a mentor, they did not perceive there was a relationship with that person. The teachers reported that they did not feel comfortable

seeking support from their mentors. The responses from these teachers also varied and seemed to have a tinge of animosity towards their mentors. One teacher frankly wrote that her mentor was “little to no help.” The relationship appeared to be non-existent as she further stated that her mentor “was not very approachable.” Another teacher wondered if her “mentor had any training” that he had “no idea what he was doing and was no help.”

A sizable group of teachers reported having a superficial relationship with their mentors. This group of participants reported that their relationship with their mentor was limited to just having a person to go to and ask questions. For instance, one teacher stated that he had been assigned a mentor well after his teaching career had begun. During the time without a mentor, he had sought out another teacher to serve in that capacity. Therefore, when he was assigned a mentor, the teacher said he “didn’t have anything against her” he just felt more comfortable working with the teacher with whom he had built a relationship. He elaborated, “I did feel as though I could ask my assigned mentor any questions, and she’d be willing to answer. That being said, I do not remember asking [my assigned mentor] many questions, if any.” Finally, a teacher reported that her relationship with her mentor was relatively superficial. She reported that her mentor “mainly just answered questions” that she did not feel “close to [my mentor].”

The final group of teachers reported having a significant relationship with their mentors. These participants stated that they had a professional relationship and had a personal relationship with their mentor. The participants that felt they had a significant relationship with their mentor effused praise with their mentor’s willingness to help and support them. As one teacher said, “she checks in regularly and ensures I have everything I need to be successful in all areas.” Another teacher spoke of how her mentor would “check on her on the weekends” when the week had been difficult.

Furthermore, one teacher remarked that her mentor was her “lifeline that first year.” Several teachers spoke of meeting with their mentors daily and planning together. One teacher likened her mentor to her mom, mentioning how sometimes her mentor would give her a “mom hug” when she needed it. Finally, in comparing the responses between the two systems, more teachers in System A reported having a significant relationship with their mentors than was reported by the participants from System B. Aside from the anecdotal evidence located in the survey responses and the focus group interviews, Table 6 aids in supporting the supposition.

Pan et al. (2000) wrote, “the preparation of mentors and development of their capacity to mentor effectively are issues that require attention.” Therefore, the suggestion for both participating systems is to use judicious criteria that include temperament and classroom performance when selecting mentor teachers. Furthermore, it is suggested that both systems provide leadership and coaching training for mentor teachers. While System A currently provides training for their mentors, it is suggested that the district-level administrators assess the effectiveness of the training already provided and the screening process for their mentors.

For System B, it is recommended that the district-level administrators create a screening process for mentors and provide training in leadership and coaching.

Another pervasive theme to emerge when investigating the teachers’ perceptions of support from their mentor teachers was communications. Similar to the relationship continuum previously described, mentor communication also falls on a constant to never continuum.

As is evidenced in Table 2, while the total percentages are relatively small when considering both systems, a substantial number of participants from System B reported they were not assigned a mentor; consequently, these teachers reported not having any contact with their mentors.

Among the teachers who were assigned a mentor, a small number of teachers reported infrequent contact with their mentors. One teacher reported that she “did not really talk much with her mentor.” Another teacher reported that her “mentor left her pretty much alone.”

Generally, the responses provided by the participants spoke of consistent communication between the mentors and the mentees. In a few cases, the communication was immediate. An excellent example of this came from one participant who spoke of receiving an email from his mentor immediately after accepting the position with the school system.

Consistent communication was prevalent in both systems of the study. For example, one teacher spoke about how she met with her mentor every day. She went on to say that her mentor was her “lifeline.” Moreover, numerous teachers reported that their mentors checked on them often, texted them, stopped by their classroom, called to check up on them, provided critical information about upcoming school events, and even became “a second mom.”

In research completed by Pan et al. (2000), the researchers found that successful mentors spent time with their mentees designing unit and lesson plans. Consequently, the final theme that consistently appeared among the participant’s responses was lesson and unit planning with their mentors. A majority of participants from both systems in the study responded positively regarding planning with their mentors. A teacher in System A reported working with his mentor about the direction he wanted to lead his “program.” He praised how his mentor was “here to help out. She was very, very open to new ideas and to listen.” Another participant from System A remarked how her mentor “made great suggestions” for her lessons before observations and provided insight into “classroom management” that made the mentee’s classroom run smoothly. Classroom management often appeared in the responses from teachers in System A.

Many in System B also spoke about the assistance they received from their mentors. One participant mentioned that her mentor “helped her out with all lesson planning.” Like System A, many participants reported receiving support from their mentors in classroom management.

While most participants in System B reported assistance from their mentors in preparing lessons and unit plans, there were a few examples of teachers who perceived their mentors were of little assistance. For example, one teacher plainly stated, “my mentor was of little or no help.” The responses from System A participants were far more positive, with a few exceptions.

Martin et al. (2016) argued that mentors must be qualified and adequately trained. The responses of this study support that view. Therefore, it is suggested that mentor teachers be adequately vetted, have the appropriate temperament, and are thoroughly trained. Furthermore, Moi (2009) proposed that mentor teachers should be released from their teaching responsibilities to concentrate solely on being mentors to new teachers. Consequently, it is suggested that mentor teachers be released from their teaching responsibilities and focus solely on mentoring. It is further suggested that there is flexibility in pairing mentors with new teachers to account for personalities, subject level, grade level, physical location, and individual needs of the mentees.

Themes Regarding School-Level Administrative Support

Leman and Pentak (2004) posit that a true leader must lead as a shepherd leads his/her flock. In order to lead like a shepherd, one must build significant relationships with the “flock.” Sinek (2014) further notes that people must trust their leaders to protect them. This type of trust is an extension of significant relationships. Consequently, a theme that permeated throughout the responses in the study regarding school-level was relationships. As was the case with the recurring theme under mentor support, the responses appeared in a relationship continuum from significant to superficial. In comparing the two systems in the study, the responses showed that

both systems' participants perceived a significant and superficial relationship with their school-level mentors. As was the case with the relationship between the new teachers and their mentors, so it was with the perceived relationship between administrators and new teachers – the more contact between the two, the more significant the perceived relationship.

Those who responded with having a significant relationship with their administrators spoke of how the administrators went out of their way to speak with and check on them. One teacher's response exemplified this action of seeking teachers out when she talked about being greeted by all administrators every day, and several asked about her family. System A had two teachers who mentioned being treated like family by their administrators. One teacher from System B spoke about how her administrator was constantly checking on her, learning about her, and supporting her. She plainly stated that she "couldn't have asked for a better principal."

While the overwhelming majority of participants in the study felt supported by their school-level administrators and felt they could ask for assistance from their administrators if needed, a substantial number of participants perceived to have a superficial relationship with their school-level administrators. One teacher said she "just doesn't have much contact with [administrators]." Another participant reported that she "didn't feel supported." Finally, one said, "I was not really known by my administration." These superficial relationships reported by the participants support the proposition advocated by Jacob et al. (2012). Those researchers suggested that school systems require their school-level administrators to properly participate in leadership training to build strong relationships.

The final theme that often appeared throughout the responses from the participants in regards to the perceived support from the school-level administrators was communication. The

perceived communication strength was based on the number of contacts between the administrators and the new teachers.

Once again, most participants from both systems expressed satisfaction with the communication between the administration and the new teachers. Several participants reported immediate and/or daily communication with their administrators. For those teachers who fell in the latter category, one teacher spoke of his administrator contacting him immediately upon his hiring and providing a school tour that included introductions. Another teacher who perceived effective communications with her administrators talked about how at least one, if not all of her administrators, spoke with her daily. The majority of the participants' perceptions of communications with their administrators fell into the former category. The responses included consistent emails, text messages, newsletters, classroom walk-throughs, and "pop-ins."

While in the clear minority, several teachers from both systems in the study reported poor or insufficient communication from their administrators. One teacher wished her administrators would be "timely in providing information." A few teachers (exclusively from System B) remarked that they wished their school-level administrators would "check in" more often.

It is suggested that school-level administrators from both systems in the study complete leadership and coaching training to provide the best possible support for new teachers. It is also suggested that school-level administrators contact their new teachers more frequently, visit the classrooms often, provide targeted feedback, and work to build a significant relationship with their new teachers.

Themes Regarding District-Level Administrative Support

The prevailing themes that appeared in the participants' responses regarding district-level administrative support dealt with professional development training and Teacher Educator Accelerator Model (TEAM) rubric training.

While it is true that participants from both of the study's systems reported that professional development was an integral part of the new teacher induction programs, this was especially true for System A. Teachers from System A effused praise for the three-day new teacher training that occurred prior to the beginning of the school year. Words used often were "beneficial," "helpful," "great," "tremendous," and "welcoming," to name a few. One teacher summed up the perceptions of many when she said, "the new staff orientation was great and exactly what I needed as a new teacher." Furthermore, participants from System A praised the director of its induction program often.

One area participants from System A reported as an area in need of improvement was the book studies. System A's new teacher induction program requires a different book study for each program year. Notably missing in the responses were the participants' perceptions of the benefits of the book studies. One teacher did mention that she did find the study on *Explicit Direct Instruction: The Power of the Well-Crafted Well-Taught Lesson* by John R. Hollinsworth and Silvia Ybarra is beneficial; however, she did not find any of the other studies helpful. Another teacher mentioned the study on Harry Wong's *The First Days of School* to be helpful.

While there were not many positive comments from the participants from System B regarding its new teacher induction program, several participants did note that the training they received as new teachers prior to the beginning of school was beneficial. These participants perceived the human resources information presented as pertinent and beneficial. Teachers also

reported they appreciated meeting with the other new teachers in the system for networking possibilities. The book study on Harry Wong's *The First Days of School* was one part of the beginning of the school year in-service training that stood out. Teachers discussed how the book was beneficial in setting up their classroom, procedures, and rules.

While several teachers responded positively to the information presented at the beginning of the year's new teacher in-service training, that was not the case for many other participants. A majority of the negative comments directed at district-level professional development training were relegated to the information from System B participants. One teacher discussed how the information was presented at a pace he became overwhelmed. Another teacher perceived the presentation of the information similarly. She noted that the presentation was "almost like information overload."

Technical training was a positive aspect of district-level training that appeared in participants' responses from both systems. Teachers mentioned that they appreciated the level of training in the use of technology. Several commented that they felt prepared to use the necessary technological platforms from day one in the classroom.

A suggestion for both systems in the study is to continue providing technology training on the platforms utilized by the system for the new teachers. Furthermore, it is suggested that both systems continue to provide the beginning of the year professional development training for new teachers in their respective systems. Finally, for both systems, it is suggested that each provide a book study throughout the appropriate year of induction that is clearly articulated the study's purpose, goal, and usefulness.

For district-level administrators in System B, suggestions include creating a targeted and purposeful mentor screening and election process, leadership and coaching training for mentors,

proper spacing, pacing, and mental processing time for the introduction of human resource documents during the beginning of the year new teacher orientation training, and differentiate the training between teachers new to the system and teachers new to the profession.

The final theme for district-level administrative support that consistently appeared in the participants' responses was training on the TEAM rubric. As was the case throughout the responses, most positive responses on TEAM rubric training came from the System A participants. Several teachers spoke as to how beneficial the training was. One teacher noted that the System A administrator in charge of TEAM rubric training broke down the rubric into its parts for easier understanding. Another System A teacher said, "we did a lot of application with the rubric and even wrote lesson plans." The System A respondents reported writing lesson plans with the rubric numerous times. All of the respondents who remarked about lesson plans found that valuable experience. Furthermore, System A participants stated an appreciation for the district-level administrator providing TEAM training throughout the year and the beginning of the year's new teacher training.

System B participants noted the benefit of TEAM training; however, the frequency of TEAM training reporting was far less than that of System A. Teachers remarked that the training was beneficial for them in the classroom. No teachers responded that TEAM training was unnecessary or not beneficial for them.

The two school systems in the study should consider providing TEAM rubric training at the beginning of the year training for all teachers new to the system. However, teachers who are new to teaching should be required to participate in more in-depth TEAM professional development training throughout the school year. Moreover, System B should consider providing

training on the TEAM rubric akin to System A's process of breaking down the rubric and writing lesson plans to assess using the rubric.

Limitations of the Study

The proposed timeframe of the study was extended by two weeks due to insufficient number of responses. The self-report nature of individual responses from focus groups and survey participants limited this study. No responses were collected beyond the perceptions-based teacher responses; consequently, no verification for the teachers' responses was obtained. The study was relegated to two rural school systems in Tennessee. Respondents from other parts of the state and or nation may share different perceptions than those represented in this study.

Conclusion

The chief conclusion from this study was the genuine passion the participants in the study displayed in their desire to improve their craft and provide the best education and support possible for their students by providing their perceptions of how they could be better supported to accomplish that feat. The school systems that were the study subjects should feel pride in the dedication exhibited by the teachers who participated in the study. Because of this dedication exhibited by the teachers, the district-level and school-level administrators should feel a responsibility to support and encourage the teachers under their charge. In doing so, not only would the perceptions of teachers be one of support and encouragement, but the beneficiary may ultimately be the students in the classroom.

Recommendations for Practice

While the overall perceptions of the participants in both school systems involved in the study were optimistic regarding the support they received or are receiving as new teachers, there are areas emphasized within the responses and information that could be improved. Some areas

are common to both systems, and some are more suited for only one system. At the system and school level, a positive response to the participants' voices will provide schools with an opportunity to serve their teachers and, ultimately, their students at a higher level. The following are practice recommendations that apply to both System A and System B:

- School systems should provide professional development training for school-level administrators that focuses on leadership and coaching.
- Mentor teachers should be released from teaching responsibilities for a term of three years in order to focus solely on mentoring new teachers.
- Allow flexibility in pairing mentor teachers with new teachers to account for personalities, subject or grade level, and individual needs of the mentee.
- District-level administrators should assist the new teachers in moving into the rural region through real estate agency contacts, apartment availability, civic and religious opportunities, and assistance in all forms of relocation.
- School systems should evaluate the effectiveness of the new teacher induction programs yearly to improve the programs.
- School-level administrators and mentors should contact new hires immediately upon being hired and remain in contact with those teachers throughout the summer.
- School-level administrators should celebrate the arrival of new teachers.
- District-level administrators should encourage newly retired teachers to become mentor teachers.
- Collegiality is a necessity; therefore, school-level administrators should provide common planning for the mentor and mentee to have effective and productive collaboration.

- School-level administrators should reduce the number of teaching preparations for new teachers.
- New teachers should be provided with a teaching assistant or teacher's aid in the classroom.
- District-level administrators should account for the direct and indirect costs of teacher attrition to assess the cost-effectiveness of the new teacher induction programs.
- Mentors and new teachers should be provided with release time to observe other teachers.
- District-level administrators should create a position responsible for administering the new teacher program and recruitment of new teachers.
- Given the financial burden of creating new administrative positions, the school systems should seek grant funding to create a regional cohort that would provide mentoring services for the region.
- The school systems should consider implementing a PAR (Peer Assistance and Review) program to reduce teacher attrition.
- District-level administrators should reassess the hiring procedures for school-level administrators and focus on hiring leaders committed to building relationships with their staff.

The responses from System A participants showed a positive perception of its new teacher induction program; consequently, the information gathered did not indicate areas of improvement solely for System A. However, the same was not true for System B. The participants' perceptions of its new teacher induction program from System B were, at best, mixed. Consequently, the following are practice recommendations that apply to System B:

- The school system should provide a qualified and trained mentor for each new teacher to the district.
- The new teacher induction program should be three to five years.
- New teachers should be gradually released from supervision by their mentor based on the progress of the individual teacher.
- If mentor teachers cannot be released from their teaching responsibilities, they should be financially compensated for their time and expertise.
- Each year's new teacher cohort should meet monthly with the district-level administrator for ongoing professional development and networking opportunities.
- District-level administrators should provide purposeful monthly professional development for new teachers centered on quality book studies throughout the school year.
- Mentor teachers should meet with their mentees at least once every two weeks and review timely school events, programs, and student data.
- District-level administrators should provide mentor teachers with a monthly checklist to be reviewed with their mentees during their meetings.
- It is recommended that school-level administrators participate with the new teachers in their building at the beginning of the year's new teacher training.

Recommendations for Further Study

- Research is needed in other rural Tennessee school districts to determine if the perceptions of this study are consistent with other rural systems.
- Research is needed in other rural school districts throughout the United States to determine if the study's findings are consistent with rural systems outside of Tennessee.

- Research to determine practical components of new teacher induction programs.
- Research is needed to determine the appropriate length of induction programs.
- Utilize quantitative methodology to research the performance of teachers who participated in new teacher induction programs in rural school systems.
- Qualitative research is needed to determine the perceptions of school-level administrators regarding teachers who participated in new teacher induction programs.
- Research new teachers' experiences, via a case study, of "culture shock" when leaving college and entering the teaching profession.
- Complete a comparative study researching the perceptions of teachers new to the profession and teachers new to the school district regarding the support provided by school-level administrators.
- Complete a comparative study researching the perceptions of teachers new to the profession and teachers new to the school district regarding the support provided by district-level administrators.
- Research the perceptions of teachers who entered the teaching profession with alternative certification.
- Given the emphasis on relationships appearing in the responses, further research is needed to determine which component(s) of the induction programs aided in building the most significant relationships with colleagues, mentors, and school-level administrators.
- In five years, research should be conducted to determine how the induction program changes impacted teacher retention in both systems.
- Due to the racial homogeneity of this study, further research is needed to determine the perceptions of new teacher induction programs from teachers of color.

- Furthermore, given the large percentage of participants reporting being female, further research is needed to determine the perceptions of new teacher induction programs from male teachers.
- Research is needed to determine the best approaches to create district-level buy-in for new teacher induction programs
- Research is needed to determine the best process for recognizing and selecting mentor teachers.

Summary

This study investigated teachers' perceptions of their participation in new teacher induction programs in selected rural Tennessee school districts. Both school systems in the study serve rural regions; one of the school systems resides in the Middle Tennessee Grand Division, and one school system is located in the East Tennessee Grand Division. The study's participants involved teachers that represented a variety of differences. The differences among the participants involved gender, teaching experience ranging from 0 to 30 years, grade levels taught ranging from Kindergarten-grade 12, a variety of content areas (i.e., English, social studies, special education, physical education), and ages ranging from 22-57. All of the participants identified as white/Caucasian. The study provided great insight into teachers' perceptions of the support they received while participating in the new teacher induction programs. These perceptions were captured by conducting focus group interviews and survey questionnaires with teachers at each level represented within the study. Results included teachers' perceptions, both positive and negative, concerning support from their mentors, school-level administrators, and district-level administrators.

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Appendix A



MILLIGAN UNIVERSITY

Date: October 15, 2021

Principal Investigator: **Jeffrey Gray**, Graduate Students, Milligan University
 From: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Milligan University
 Project: *An Investigation of Two New-Teacher Induction Programs and Their Impact on Teachers in Select Rural School Districts in Tennessee*
 IRB Tracking Number: **2021-04**
 IRB Approval Number: **Exp2110151433**
 Subject: **Final Approval**

On behalf of the Milligan University Institutional Review Board (IRB), we are writing to inform you that the above-mentioned study has been approved as expedited. This approval also indicates that you have fulfilled the IRB requirements for Milligan University.

All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission, meaning that you will follow the research plan you have outlined here, use approved materials, and follow university policies.

Take special note of the following important aspects of your approval:

- Any changes made to your study require approval from the IRB Committee before they can be implemented as part of your study. Contact the IRB Committee at **IRB@milligan.edu** with your questions and/or proposed modifications;
- If there are any unanticipated problems or complaints from participants during your data collection, you must notify the Milligan University IRB Office within 24 hours of the data collection problem or complaint;
- Milligan University requires specific formatting when collecting demographic data on gender; please contact me if you need assistance with this formatting.

The Milligan University IRB Committee is pleased to congratulate you on the approval of your research proposal. Best wishes as you conduct your research! If you have any questions about your IRB Approval, please contact the IRB Office and copy your faculty advisor if appropriate on the communication.

On behalf of the IRB Committee,

Trini Rangel, Ph.D.
 Chair, Institutional Review Board
 Milligan University



Appendix B

- 1) To what degree do new teachers to the district feel supported by their mentors?
 - a. Describe your experience in being assigned a mentor.
 - b. How did your mentor support you as a teacher? (in the classroom, socially and emotionally, acclimation to the school culture)
 - c. How was your mentor most helpful to you as a new teacher?
 - d. How could your mentor have been more helpful to you as a new teacher?

- 2) To what degree do new teachers to the district feel supported by the school level administrators during their participation in the new teacher program?
 - a. How did your school level administrator(s) support you as a teacher? (in the classroom, socially and emotionally, acclimation to the school culture)
 - b. How was your school level administrator(s) most helpful to you as a new teacher?
 - c. How could your school level administrator(s) have been more helpful to you as a new teacher?

- 3) To what degree do new teachers to the district feel supported by professional development opportunities provided by their district during their participation in the new teacher induction program?
 - a. How did your district level professional development support you as a teacher?
 - b. How was your district level professional development most helpful to you as a new teacher?
 - c. How could your district level professional development have been more helpful to you as a new teacher?

Appendix C

1. How many years have you taught in public schools?
2. How many years have you taught in your current district?
3. In what type of school were/are you teaching when you participated in the district's new teacher induction program?
4. What content area or grade level did/do you teach when you participated in the district's new teacher induction program?
5. Were you assigned a mentor during your induction program?
6. If so, by whom was your mentor assigned?
7. Where was your mentor located?
8. How often did/do you meet with your mentor?
9. I was/am comfortable approaching my mentor to ask for needed support.
10. I felt/feel supported by my mentor during my new teacher induction program.
11. What types of support did/do you receive from your mentor?
12. What could/can the mentor have done differently to better support you as a new teacher?
13. What types of support from your mentor did/do you feel were/is particularly helpful?
14. I was/am comfortable approaching my administrator(s) to ask for needed support.
15. I felt/feel supported by your school-level administration during the new teacher induction program?
16. What types of support did/do you receive from your school-level administrator(s)?
17. What could the school-level administration have done/do differently to better support you as a new teacher?

18. What types of support from your school-level administrator(s) did/do you feel were particularly helpful?
19. I was/am comfortable approaching my district-level administrator(s) to ask for needed support.
20. I felt/feel supported by your district-level administration during the new teacher induction program?
21. What types of support did/do you receive from your district-level administrator(s)?
22. What could your district-level administrator(s) have done/do differently to better support you as a new teacher?
23. What types of support from your district-level administrator(s) did/do you feel were/are most helpful?
24. I felt/feel the professional learning opportunities provided by my district-level administrator(s) supported/support me in the classroom?