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From Teacher Attrition to Teacher Retention: The Role of School Principals

by
Karen Balmer

A dissertation submitted to the faculty of Bethel University
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education

St. Paul, MN
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Approved by:
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@ 2024

Karen Balmer

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Abstract

This quantitative study explored the role of school principals as an intervention to the teacher shortage crisis in the United States. The shortage of teachers is not a new topic in public policy and research; however, the strategies set forth in prior literature have not yielded substantive change to this stubborn problem. Using data from the 2020–2021 National Teacher and Principal Survey, this study analyzed the relationship between the perceptions of early career teachers (within the first 5 years of teaching) about behaviors of their school principals and these teachers' intentions to remain in the teaching profession. Specifically, this study examined teachers' perceptions of five behaviors relating to communication, vision, feedback, support, and schoolwide discipline. The analysis showed that teachers who held favorable perceptions about their principals' behaviors in all five areas had stronger long-term intentions about remaining in teaching than teachers who reported unfavorable perceptions. The study relied on burnout theory as a means to understanding teacher burnout, which contributes to teacher attrition and subsequent teacher shortages. The data demonstrated that school principals play a critical role in interrupting this cycle by engaging in communication, feedback, vision-casting, and student disciplinary practices that teachers perceive as supportive.

Keywords: teacher attrition, burnout, teacher retention, principals, communication, feedback

This work is dedicated to current and future principals. The role of a school principal is complex and not always understood. We have an incredible opportunity to contribute in beautiful ways, shaping our school communities and positively impacting the lives of the teachers, staff, and students in our care. This is not easy or light work, but if we do it well we will leave a lasting imprint not just on the lives of individuals, but potentially on our entire educational system.

Acknowledgements

I am grateful for the people the Lord has placed in my life to encourage and cheer me on, my “balcony people” in the wise words of my Aunt Anne. My husband David is my greatest friend and partner and has been a steady and encouraging presence through my dissertation journey. My precious boys, Colton and Jackson, have brought countless moments of joy and levity throughout this process, and while the doctoral accomplishment is indeed significant, there is no greater calling and title than to be their Mom. My Dad, my extended family, and my friends are treasures; I am blessed to be surrounded by wise and loving people who care for me so well and who continue to point me to Jesus and His great love.

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List of Abbreviations

IES	Institute for Education Sciences
K–12	Kindergarten through Grade 12
NAEP	National Assessment of Educational Progress
NCES	National Center for Education Statistics
NTPS	National Teacher and Principal Survey

Chapter 1: Introduction

Stand and Deliver (Menendez, 1988), Dead Poets Society (Weir, 1989), and Mr. Holland's Opus (Herek, 1995) are three renowned movies that celebrate the power of teachers. By multiple measures, each of these movies was a great success. In 1989, Stand and Deliver was an Academy Award nominee and won numerous other awards (Internet Movie Database, n.d.). In 1990, Dead Poets Society won multiple awards, including the Academy Award for Best Original Screenplay, and earned multiple Academy Award nominations. Similarly, in 1995, Mr. Holland's Opus won multiple awards and was an Academy Award nominee. These powerful and inspiring stories illustrate the incredible opportunity that teachers have to positively impact the lives and futures of students. Well-known individuals often cite influential teachers as a reason for their success. Maya Angelou, for example, attributed finding her voice after surviving terrible life circumstances to a teacher who became an influential force for good in her life (Angelou, 2009). Additionally, Bill Gates attributed much of his success to his fourth-grade teacher, Mrs. Caffiere, who took him under her wing, inspired him, and sparked his lifelong love for learning (Ritschel, 2020).

Much of the public discourse around the teaching profession recognizes that most individuals who enter the teaching profession do so with noble intentions, a deep sense of purpose, and a desire to make a difference in the lives of young people (Fray & Gore, 2018; Kotowski et al., 2022; Maslach et al., 1997). Over the last 40 years, researchers have demonstrated that individuals are motivated to enter the teaching profession for largely altruistic reasons, including a desire to serve society, make a positive difference in the lives of young people, exercise creativity, and engage in meaningful work (Kwok et al., 2022; Rutten & Badiali, 2020). Yet there is a disconnect given the reality of the number of teachers leaving the profession

and the resulting teacher shortage crisis in the United States (Hanks et al, 2020).

The teacher shortage exists despite a substantial investment of taxpayer dollars annually on public education. Annual spending on K–12 U.S. public education for the 2019–2020 school year was \$795 billion, which included funds from federal, state, and local sources (Cornman et al., 2022). The largest portion of this spending, approximately 80%, was for salaries and benefits (Cornman et al., 2022). Broken down, the total spending translates to an average of \$15,711 for each individual student (Cornman et al., 2022). However, it is important to note that spending by states varied greatly—from \$9,907 and \$9,989 per student in Idaho and Utah respectively to \$29,422 and \$30,082 per student in New York and the District of Columbia respectively. The difference in spending per state is attributable to a number of factors, including cost of living, the way each state counts individual students, the way they fund specific populations (e.g., English language learners, special education students, and low-income students), the way they utilize local property taxes, and their overall funding model (Biasi, 2021; Fischer et al., 2021; Lafortune et al., 2018). While the specific shortages may vary based on local contexts and labor markets, some manifestation of a teacher shortage exists within nearly every state in the nation, including states where the funding levels are the highest (Sutcher et al., 2019).

Teacher shortages negatively impact students' academic achievement (Sutcher et al., 2019), which is especially concerning given that national assessment data paints an increasingly grim picture of student performance. Between 2019 and 2022, data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), known as “The Nation’s Report Card,” showed an average decline of 3 points in reading scores for both fourth-grade and eighth-grade students (U.S. Department of Education, 2022). The fourth-grade reading scores in 2022 were the lowest since 2005 and the eighth-grade reading scores in 2022 were the lowest since 1998. In

mathematics, the NAEP scores showed an average decline of 5 points for fourth-grade students and an average decline of 8 points for eighth-graders between 2019 and 2022. Students' 2022 achievement results were the lowest since 2005 and 2003 for fourth-grade students and eighth-grade students respectively.

These declines also represent declines in overall proficiency. NAEP provides four designations for proficiency: Advanced, Proficient, Basic, and Below Basic. In 2022, 37% of fourth-grade students' reading scores were in the Below Basic proficiency level, which is an increase from 34% in 2019, and the number of students in the Proficient level decreased from 26% to 24%. Similarly, 30% of eighth-grade students' scores were Below Basic, up 3% from 27% in 2019, and the number of students at the Proficient level decreased from 29% to 27%. The NAEP data in mathematics mirrors the reading data, wherein proficiency has declined for both fourth-grade students and eighth-grade students. Fourth graders performing in the Below Basic level increased from 19% to 25% in 2022, and fourth graders performing in the Proficient level decreased from 32% to 29%. Eighth-grade student performance in the Below Basic level grew from 31% to 38%, and their performance in the Proficient level shrunk from 24% to 20%.

In an effort to explain the declines in performance, an argument could be made that the 2022 scores were a reflection of the prior two years when schools were greatly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, subsequent school closures, and alternate delivery approaches. The 2019 NAEP administration was prior to the COVID-19 crisis; as such, perhaps an argument could be made that the decline in students' achievement in 2022 was a function of schools still working to stabilize and recover from the pandemic. Unfortunately, additional NAEP data from 2023 showed a continued decline in students' achievement (U.S. Department of Education, 2023). In late 2023, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) administered the long-term trend

assessments in both reading and math. This NAEP assessment was given to 13-year-old students and yielded disheartening results. Specifically, average reading scores for 13-year-old students were 4 points lower in 2023 than in 2020 and average math scores for 13-year-old students were 9 points lower than in 2020. Both the 2022 and 2023 NAEP data show that students' achievement is continuing to move in the wrong direction.

Similar data has been reported on Star assessments, which are another suite of nationally norm-referenced assessments used by more than 34,000 schools and districts across the United States (Renaissance, 2023). As norm-referenced tools, the Star assessments provide comparative data between individual students and a norm group. The Star assessments are criterion-referenced, meaning that they compare an individual student's performance against a predetermined set of standards. These assessments are powerful tools for educators, providing another critical lens into students' achievement. Like the NAEP data, Star data showed that student outcomes have decreased following the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 (Renaissance Learning, 2022). Data were analyzed from 4.4 million students in reading and 2.9 million students in math. Both the reading and the math assessments showed that student performance was lower when comparing 2021–2022 data to the prior year, 2020–2021. The data also showed that student growth rates between fall and winter administrations lagged behind pre-COVID-19 growth rates.

This data paints a dismal picture of student achievement in the United States, and student performance is not likely to improve in the midst of a national teacher shortage. In order to address the teacher shortage, attention must be given to the underlying causes, including teacher burnout. Burnout is a well-established phenomenon. It was first identified in 1974 as a form of exhaustion by clinical psychologist Herbert Freudenberger; Freudenberger further identified

symptoms of burnout in the workplace, including malaise, fatigue, frustration, cynicism, and inefficacy (Reith, 2018). Maslach and Jackson's (1981) research built on the understanding of burnout in the workplace as a psychological syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment that can occur among individuals who work with other people in some capacity. Farber's (1984) work also contributed to the understanding of burnout, defining it as "the final step in a progression of unsuccessful attempts to cope with negative stress conditions" (p. 324). In other words, burnout is often "the result of an imbalance between occupational demands and having the resources to manage the demands" (Kotowski et al., 2022, p. 408). Given this reality, burnout is often a precursor to attrition.

Retention is the antidote to attrition. Research to date provides glimpses into some of the conditions that contribute to retention. For example, school working conditions and the professional climate of a school are often cited as key levers that influence teachers' intent to remain in the profession (Berry et al., 2021; DeAngelis & Presley, 2011; Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018; Greenberg et al., 2016; Podolsky et al., 2016; Wronowski, 2018). School leadership, which includes the role of the school principal, is considered a part of these environmental factors and is often cited as one of the most important variables relating to teacher retention (Berry et al., 2021; Greenberg et al., 2016; Grissom et al., 2015; Kim et al., 2017; Learning Policy Institute, 2017; Podolsky et al., 2016; Reitman & Karge, 2019).

Teachers desire to feel supported by the principal (Reitman & Karge, 2019; Whipp & Geronime, 2017). This includes new teachers; if they feel supported by a principal they are able to grow both in confidence and competence as a teacher, which in turn translates to retention (Reitman & Karge, 2019). A strong and positive view of a principal can mitigate other school characteristics that might otherwise impact teachers' retention, such as less desirable

compensation (Learning Policy Institute, 2017; Player et al., 2017; Podolsky et al., 2016). Conversely, lack of support and dissatisfaction with the principal are significant factors contributing to teacher attrition (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Learning Policy Institute, 2017).

But in terms of daily practice, it is not yet clear how principals can operationalize this research and what it means in terms of specific practices to employ that teachers will perceive as supportive. There could be great value in identifying specific communication and feedback practices that a principal could leverage to increase loyalty, fuel motivation, and improve professional satisfaction. Exploring these ideas more fully could hold potentially valuable and actionable insights which could, in turn, help to decrease teacher attrition and increase retention.

Statement of the Problem

There is a clear and persistent shortage of teachers in American classrooms. This problem is not new; the seminal report in 1983, entitled *A Nation at Risk*, cited that significant teacher shortages existed in key fields, namely science and mathematics (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983; Wright, 2020). Since then, the issue of teacher shortages has become a consistent theme within education policy, research, and dialogue in nearly every state in the nation (Espinoza et al., 2018; Hanks et al., 2020; Sutcher et al., 2016; Sutcher et al., 2019).

The Teacher Shortage Landscape

Like many public policy issues, the teacher shortage in America is complex and nuanced. Teacher shortages do not manifest uniformly across all schools and classrooms; rather, shortages may look quite different depending on the educational context. Teacher shortages are more pronounced in some areas than in others, in particular areas related to content or subject matter, geography, school demographics, or student characteristics (Berry & Shields, 2017;

Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Diliberti et al., 2021; Hanks et al., 2020; Nguyen et al., 2022; Sutchter et al., 2019). At least 40 states have reported chronic shortages to the United States Department of Education in math, special education, science, and world languages positions, and over 30 states have reported chronic shortages in other fields, including bilingual education and career and technical education (Behrstock-Sherratt, 2016; Darling-Hammond, 2022; Espinoza et al., 2018; Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018; Sutchter et al., 2019).

However, no field of teaching appears to be exempt from these challenges. Elementary school teaching positions have historically been perceived to be an area of surplus but are increasingly cited as a shortage area by school districts (Sutchter et al., 2019). Teacher shortages are also more acute in schools serving low-income populations, low-performing students, students with disabilities, non-White students, and English language learners (Behrstock-Sherratt, 2016; Espinoza et al., 2018; Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018; Player et al., 2017; Podolsky et al., 2016; Redding & Henry, 2018; Ronfeldt et al., 2013; Vagi et al., 2019).

The most significant driver within teacher shortages is teachers' attrition prior to retirement (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Espinoza et al., 2018; Learning Policy Institute, 2017). From 1988–2008, the attrition rate nationally rose from 6.4% to 9% — a 41% increase during that time (Allegretto & Mishel, 2016). The economic recession of 2008 impacted the attrition rates, with fewer teachers leaving for a few subsequent years; however, since 2013, the attrition rate has increased again (Ingersoll et al., 2018). Between 2013 and 2023, the average annual rate of attrition nationally has been 8%, and stated from the demand side, as much as 90% of the annual demand for teachers is attributable to attrition (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Eginli, 2021; Espinoza et al., 2018; Learning Policy Institute, 2017; Wang et al., 2021).

A consistent trend within the data is that less than one-third of the attrition is due to teachers' retirement, which then indicates that the remaining attrition is due to early career and mid-career teachers leaving (Allegretto & Mishel, 2016; Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Eginli, 2021; Espinoza et al., 2018). Of particular concern is that the number of early career teachers leaving the profession has grown. By 2011, it was estimated that as many as 40% to 50% of teachers were leaving the profession within the first 5 years of their teaching career (Ingersoll et al., 2018). Since 2011, the attrition rate for teachers in their first 5 years has stabilized at roughly 40% (Wang, 2021; Williams et al., 2022). Unfortunately, large-scale analyses of teacher preparation enrollment, K–12 student enrollment, student-teacher ratios in K–12 schools, and teachers' attrition have projected continued and even growing teacher shortages (Hanks et al., 2020; Sutchter et al., 2019).

Public school teachers are the largest population of public employees (Grissom et al., 2015). Relative to other public employees, the attrition rate for teachers is higher, and teachers' attrition rate is higher than many other professions including nurses, lawyers, engineers, and pharmacists (Garcia et al., 2022; Grissom et al., 2015). This trend also extends to international comparisons; the attrition rate for teachers in the United States is notably higher than in academically high-performing countries such as Singapore, Finland, and Canada, where the annual attrition rate is typically between 3% and 4% (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018; Sutchter et al., 2019). These countries invest substantially in the full spectrum of teacher development, from preservice preparation to early career mentoring and ongoing professional development, as well as by offering competitive salaries (Darling-Hammond, 2022).

While the difference between 8% and 3%–4% may appear to be nominal, even a slight

improvement in teacher attrition would translate into a substantial decrease in demand for teachers. For example, if the attrition rate in the United States improved to 4%, that would represent approximately 130,000 fewer teachers that would need to be hired each year (Sutcher et al., 2019). These data points demonstrate a sobering reality: Across multiple comparative groups (other public employees, other non-public professionals, and teachers in other countries) the problem of teacher attrition in America is significant.

The COVID-19 pandemic introduced additional challenges into an already complex and concerning reality. Uncertainty about school operations (e.g., remote learning), concerns about increased learning losses and students' achievement gaps, questions about student mental health needs, and the resulting stress from all of these issues have impacted teachers greatly and had an immediate effect on the already significant teacher shortage, with turnover rates that doubled during the course of the pandemic (Garcia et al., 2022; Kotowski et al., 2022; Lachlan et al., 2020). What is not yet known is how long-lasting the effects of the pandemic will be, whether the effects of this specific variable will taper, or whether it will continue to be a significant variable in this discussion (Kotowski et al., 2022).

Vacancies in Schools

As a result of the gap between teacher supply and demand, schools face challenges to fill vacancies and to replace teachers with qualified candidates (Beymer et al., 2023; Ingersoll et al., 2021; Ryan et al., 2017; Vagi et al., 2019). States have developed processes to allow schools to hire individuals who have not completed a teacher preparation program nor fulfilled the requirements to become a licensed teacher through the use of provisional, emergency, or temporary certifications. Although these individuals are permitted by their state's regulatory body and are legally employed, they may not bring the same depth of professional training and

credentialing to their classrooms (Hanks et al., 2020).

Between 2016 and 2018, reports indicated that between 87,000–100,000 teaching positions were filled by unqualified individuals as schools utilized all possible resources to fill vacancies (Espinoza et al., 2018; Nguyen et al., 2022; Sutchter et al., 2019). Schools have placed teachers in classrooms outside of their licensure field or certification area, and in many situations have left teaching vacancies unfilled (Garcia & Weiss, 2019; McHenry-Sorber & Campbell, 2019; Nguyen et al., 2022). These situations can result in a highly variable workforce, where many schools' staffing includes teachers who are underqualified, alternatively certified, or teaching outside their field of expertise (Beymer et al., 2023; Nguyen et al., 2022).

Pipeline into the Profession

The pipeline of individuals entering the teaching profession is another significant factor in the teacher shortage crisis, as evidenced by declines in both the number of education majors and the number of education degrees conferred (Schmitt & deCourcy, 2022). Enrollment in teacher education programs since 2010 in the United States dropped by over 30% (Espinoza, et al., 2018; Partelow, 2019); nearly every state in the country experienced a decline between 2010 and 2018, with some states dropping over 50% (Partelow, 2019). Other data indicate that the teaching profession is becoming less desirable, showing that just 4.2% of college freshmen had intentions to major in education (O'Leary, 2020). This represents a steep decline from what freshmen had reported in prior surveys spanning several decades: 11% in 2000, 10% in 1990, and 11% in 1971 (O'Leary, 2020).

Further, between 2010 and 2018, the number of teacher preparation program completers declined by 28%; that is, people who entered a program but did not complete it increased significantly (Partelow, 2019). The number of education degrees awarded annually in

undergraduate programs had reached nearly 200,000 in the early 1970s but fell to less than 90,000 in 2018–2019 (King & James, 2022). As such, with the small numbers and declining enrollment in many education programs, higher education institutions are sunsetting programs, which only further compounds the teacher shortage problem (Garcia et al., 2022; King & James, 2022).

Teacher Attrition Implications

Teacher attrition is cause for concern for multiple reasons, including the significant negative financial implications. Recurring costs associated with recruitment, onboarding, and ongoing professional development divert precious dollars away from other necessary investments in student learning (Garcia et al., 2022; Vagi et al., 2019). Estimates of annual financial loss due to teacher attrition range from \$7.3 to \$8.5 billion in the United States and as much as \$5.6 million for a single school district (Greenberg et al., 2016; Podolsky et al., 2016; Wronowski, 2018). The costs between rural and urban schools vary greatly; since 2016 the estimated cost of losing one rural teacher was as high as \$9,000 and the estimated cost of losing one urban teacher was as high as \$21,000 (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Espinoza et al., 2018; Garcia & Weiss, 2019; Learning Policy Institute, 2017).

Beyond the tremendous financial burden associated with teacher attrition, there are troubling implications in terms of students' academic achievement. Teacher shortages in recent years have led to schools being staffed by a higher proportion of less experienced teachers (Kini & Podolsky, 2016; Redding & Henry, 2018). There is an even higher proportion of less experienced teachers in high-poverty schools serving primarily students of color and English language learners (Beymer et al., 2023; Kini & Podolsky, 2016; Player et al., 2017; Podolsky et al., 2016; Redding & Henry, 2018), which further exacerbates students' achievement challenges.

Students' achievement in math and reading is negatively impacted by teacher attrition, and the impact is more significant for lower-performing students (Greenberg et al., 2016; Lee, 2018; Ronfeldt et al., 2013; Vagi et al., 2019).

Having experienced teachers is a critical component to fostering students' achievement (Wronowski, 2018). Teachers grow significantly in their first years of teaching, and that growth translates to increased students' achievement (Kini & Podolsky, 2016; Reichardt et al., 2020; Wronowski, 2018) as well as stronger K–12 attendance and subsequent post-secondary enrollment (Kini & Podolsky, 2016; Lee, 2018). Beyond the benefits to individual students, having experienced teachers in a school benefits new teachers through sharing knowledge and opportunities for collaboration (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Kini & Podolsky, 2016).

Given this reality, the current and projected teacher shortages, and particularly the rate at which teachers are leaving the profession within the first 5 years, are alarming. As such, the question of how to retain teachers has become increasingly significant and critical to sustain the integrity and effectiveness of the American educational system. Indeed, the issue of teacher retention is worthy of further investigation. This study focuses on the distinct and potentially significant role of school principals as a lever for addressing this urgent issue. A growing body of research suggests the significance of the role of school principals and how effective principals can impact a school community (Wallace Foundation, 2023). Principals are on the front lines in public schools, experiencing firsthand the negative effects of teacher attrition, the subsequent shortages and hiring challenges, and the resulting negative impacts on their students' growth and academic achievement. Principals also experience the positive effects of a strong and stable teaching force in their schools. As such, they are well positioned to not only understand the

importance of retaining teachers, but they are also positioned to serve as powerful change agents in this important work.

Purpose of the Study

School principals' daily proximity to teachers' work provides them with a window of insight and understanding into the demands of teaching as well as an opportunity for ongoing relationships and engagement. Their role uniquely positions principals to engage meaningfully with teachers, to address challenges, and to provide support in ways that might engender a deeper commitment for teachers to persist in the profession. Toward that end, this quantitative study explored how school principals can leverage their role to strengthen teachers' retention, and in particular, how they might interrupt the trend of teachers leaving the profession within the first 5 years.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

This study examined five questions within two categories. The first two research questions focus on teachers' first year of teaching; the remaining three research questions focus on teachers' current year of teaching.

Research Question #1: Is there a statistically significant ($p < .05$) difference in elementary teachers' intent to remain in the teaching profession based on their perceptions of having received supportive communication from principals or other administrators during the first year of teaching?

H₀₁: There is no difference in elementary teachers' intent to remain in the teaching profession based on their perceptions of having received supportive communication from principals or other administrators during the first year of teaching.

H_{a1}: There is a difference in elementary teachers' intent to remain in the teaching

profession based on their perceptions of having received supportive communication from principals or other administrators during the first year of teaching.

Research Question #2: Is there a statistically significant ($p < .05$) difference in elementary teachers' intent to remain in the teaching profession based on their perceptions of having received meaningful feedback beyond formal evaluations during the first year of teaching?

Ho2: There is no difference in elementary teachers' intent to remain in the teaching profession based on their perceptions of having received meaningful feedback beyond formal evaluations during the first year of teaching.

Ha2: There is a difference in elementary teachers' intent to remain in the teaching profession based on their perceptions of having received meaningful feedback beyond formal evaluations during the first year of teaching.

Research Question #3: Is there a statistically significant ($p < .05$) difference in elementary teachers' intent to remain in the teaching profession based on their perceptions of their school administrators' behavior as supportive and encouraging?

Ho3: There is no difference in elementary teachers' intent to remain in the teaching profession based on their perceptions of school administrators' behavior as supportive and encouraging.

Ha3: There is a difference in elementary teachers' intent to remain in the teaching profession based on their perceptions of school administrators' behavior as supportive and encouraging.

Research Question #4: Is there a statistically significant ($p < .05$) difference in elementary teachers' intent to remain in the teaching profession based on their perceptions of

their school principals enforcing school rules and supporting teachers?

Ho4: There is no difference in elementary teachers' intent to remain in the teaching profession based on their perceptions of the school principal enforcing school rules for student conduct and supporting the teacher.

Ha4: There is a difference in elementary teachers' intent to remain in the teaching profession based on their perceptions of the school principal enforcing school rules for student conduct and supporting the teacher.

Research Question #5: Is there a statistically significant ($p < .05$) difference in elementary teachers' intent to remain in the teaching profession based on their perceptions of their school principals' having a vision and communicating it to the staff?

Ho5: There is no difference in elementary teachers' intent to remain in the teaching profession based on their perceptions of the school principal having a vision and communicating it to the staff.

Ha5: There is a difference in elementary teachers' intent to remain in the teaching profession based on their perceptions of the school principal having a vision and communicating it to the staff.

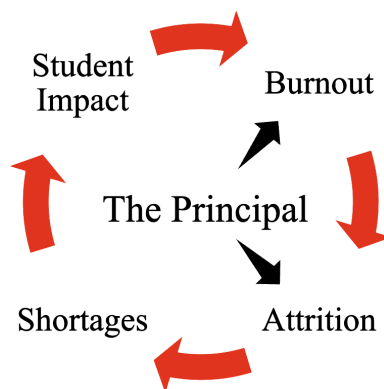
Significance of the Study

There is a significant teacher shortage in the United States. Far too many teachers enter the profession but do not remain, especially those who are early in their teaching career. It has been unclear how to disrupt this trajectory, and in particular, how school principals might effectively utilize their role to support teachers more meaningfully, reducing burnout and strengthening retention as a result. This study sought to provide insight into how principals might help to interrupt the vicious cycle of teacher burnout and attrition that leads to shortages and

declining students' achievement.

Figure 1

Interrupting the Current Cycle



Recommendations about how to increase teacher retention have existed in the literature for many years but have not yielded an impact on teacher attrition. The recommendations appear to be generic, a sort of one-size-fits-all approach for principals to apply uniformly to all teachers, indiscriminate of underlying issues relating to burnout that a teacher may be experiencing; this represents a gap in the literature. This study's findings include strategies that could be utilized more effectively either as preventative measures or as interventions to address specific individual needs and in doing so, principals could provide targeted, meaningful support that would reduce burnout and subsequent attrition. Focusing these efforts within a teachers' first 5 years of teaching is particularly important given the alarming attrition rates during those early years (Wang et al., 2021; Williams et al., 2022).

Policymakers may benefit from exploring and understanding how specific actions within principals' purview could positively impact teacher retention. Information about actions or strategies that are found to be impactful may inform national and state standards, which in turn may help to strengthen principal preparation programs, both in terms of coursework and clinical or field experiences. In doing so, the next generation of school principals may be better equipped

to support the needs of teachers. This work could influence the understanding of principals' primary functions and goals within a school community and the daily expectations and priorities within those goals.

Identifying practices that teachers perceive to be supportive may offer an opportunity to stabilize the teaching force, and if these efforts are successful there may be renewed capacity to address other pressing matters, the most significant being student outcomes. As long as the teacher crisis continues, resources will continue to be funneled toward a vicious cycle of hiring, onboarding, and training new teachers rather than to other means of supporting students' achievement. By identifying specific and clear practices that principals can employ, principals can be empowered to impact their local context and strengthen retention, one teacher at a time.

Definition of Terms

Attrition. Teachers who exit the profession (Grissom et al., 2015); teachers who leave the profession due to personal reasons (e.g., health-related, family changes or moves, retirement) or due to moving to a different job than teaching (Cooper & Alvarado, 2006)

Burnout. “A psychological syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment that can occur among individuals who work with other people in some capacity” (Maslach & Jackson, 1981); “the final step in a progression of unsuccessful attempts to cope with negative stress conditions” (Farber, 1984); the result of an imbalance between occupational demands and having the resources to manage the demands (Kotowski et al., 2022)

Elementary School Teacher. A teacher of young students in multiple, basic subjects (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2023a). There are different configurations for elementary schools in the United States; there is not an agreed-upon definition of what constitutes an elementary

school. This study includes elementary teachers in kindergarten through fifth grade.

Mobility. Teachers who move to a different teaching position but who remain in the profession (Grissom et al., 2015)

Principal. A school's primary leader whose role is to oversee all school operations. (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2023b). There are different titles for these leaders; this study will use the language of principal as an all-encompassing term for school leaders.

Retention. Teachers remaining in the teaching profession (Kletchermans, 2017)

Self-contained classroom. Classrooms where a teacher provides instruction in multiple subjects to the same group of students for all or most of the school day (NCES, n.d.a)

Shortage. The gap between the number of projected number of teachers needed and the projected number of teachers available for hire (Garcia et al., 2022); an insufficient supply of qualified individuals who are willing to work within the existing wages and conditions, an imbalance between the number of teachers needed and the number of qualified teachers available to fill the positions (Sutcher, et al., 2016)

Teacher Shortage Area. An area of specific grade, subject matter, or discipline classification, or a geographic area in which the Secretary determines that there is an inadequate supply of elementary or secondary school teachers (Cross, 2017)

Turnover. Teachers who leave their teaching position; the combined impact of teacher mobility and teacher attrition (Grissom et al., 2015; Kim et al., 2017)

Organization of the Remainder of the Study

Chapter 2 provides a review of the literature surrounding teacher attrition, including the contributing factors and challenging realities of the teaching profession as well as the unique role of a school principal as a possible mediating variable. Chapter 2 explores Maslach's burnout

theory as a foundation for better understanding the variables and possible remedies. Chapter 3 sets forth the research design, instrumentation, sampling, data collection and analysis, limitations, delimitations, and ethical considerations of the study. Chapter 4 presents the results and analysis of the data, and Chapter 5 offers conclusions, implications, and recommendations for further study and application of the findings.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

The previous chapter provided a picture of the teacher shortage in American public schools and the need to explore opportunities to change the trajectory. The purpose of this study was to explore how school principals might contribute to increased teacher retention. Toward that end, Maslach's burnout theory (Maslach & Jackson, 1981) was used to better understand the underlying problem of teacher burnout, which increases the risk of attrition. Then, four dominant themes were explored; together these themes represent significant challenges facing public school teachers and contribute to the problem of burnout and subsequent attrition. A discussion of the typical school principals' role follows, including the common understanding of duties and responsibilities, professional standards, and preparation and licensure requirements. This context is important, as it serves as the foundation on which any new research and recommendations will be built. The purpose of this study was to determine specific actions that principals can utilize that will support teachers away from burnout and toward remaining in the profession in a meaningful way.

Theoretical Framework

Theory holds an important role within scholarly research, helping to explain "how and why the variables are related, acting as a bridge between or among the variables" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 72). Maslach's burnout theory provides a lens for further understanding how the interactions between teachers and principals might have a positive impact, leading to increased retention, or a negative impact, contributing to attrition.

The Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) was created in 1981 as a way to investigate three

areas contributing to professional burnout: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). The inventory was developed and administered to individuals in human service fields, including education, and was found to be both reliable and valid. As a result of the significant demands associated with teaching and growing concerns about national teacher shortages, an inventory was subsequently developed in 1986 to measure burnout specific to educators; this new instrument was called the Maslach Burnout Inventory - Educators Survey (MBI-ES). In the MBI-ES, the same three dimensions of burnout were measured, but some of the language was changed to ensure clarity (e.g., “recipient” changed to “student”). Like the original MBI, the MBI-ES was tested for reliability and validity with very similar results (Maslach et al., 1997).

Since its development, the MBI has been used around the world and has continued to be a valuable diagnostic and research tool, yielding significant insights. In 2019, the World Health Organization identified burnout as an occupational phenomenon and used the same three dimensions as the MBI to define burnout (World Health Organization, 2019). Further, the World Health Organization recognized burnout as an occupational experience that employers must pay attention to and address in their organizations (Maslach & Leiter, 2021).

Teachers’ psychological functioning plays an important role in their professional lives; those who suffer from poor psychological functioning are more likely to experience burnout, which can lead to attrition (Collie et al., 2018). For teachers who experience burnout but who continue in the profession, there are other likely and negative impacts, including absenteeism and diminished commitment (Lee & Eissenstat, 2018). Maslach’s Burnout Inventory provides three dimensions of burnout (emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, personal accomplishment); each dimension offers important insights for school principals as they seek to interrupt patterns

of teacher burnout and subsequent attrition. According to McLean et al. (2019), emotional exhaustion “refers to physical exhaustion and the lack of the emotional resources necessary to accomplish work-related responsibilities” (p. 504); depersonalization is defined by “negative, callous, and cynical feelings and attitudes directed at students or colleagues” (p. 504); and lack of personal accomplishment “refers to a general feeling of dissatisfaction about one’s accomplishments” (p. 504). Each of these dimensions is a unique manifestation of burnout (McLean et al., 2019).

Research suggests that not all teachers experience the dimensions in the same way. For example, younger teachers tend to score higher on the emotional exhaustion subscale than their older counterparts, and male teachers tend to score higher on the depersonalization subscale than their female counterparts. For many teachers, however, the presence of depersonalization tends to co-exist with the presence of emotional exhaustion, indicating a likely correlation (Maslach et al., 1997).

The MBI-ES has demonstrated the significance of the third subscale for teachers, which is the dimension focused on personal accomplishment. Teachers typically enter the profession fueled by a deep desire to help students and to foster learning and growth (Maslach et al., 1997). When their sense of personal accomplishment is diminished, there are very few other areas that serve as a reward (e.g., compensation). As such, it is critical for teachers to maintain a strong sense of personal accomplishment. Further analysis identified specific job-related variables that contribute to a sense of personal accomplishment, including participation in decision-making, professional autonomy, and having social support networks (Maslach et al., 1997). These are critical insights for school principals as they engage with their teaching staff and work to create the conditions for teachers to thrive.

When teachers experience burnout, there are negative impacts on a school community both in terms of finances and students' achievement, as well as negative impacts on school and classroom climate (McLean et al., 2019). As such, school principals have a vested interest in minimizing burnout for their teachers. Maslach's dimensions provide a powerful lens to further explore and understand retention strategies.

Challenges Contributing to Burnout and Attrition

Teaching has always been a demanding profession, and the stressors have continued to grow (Landsbergis et al., 2020). A clear understanding of the demands and stressors provides critical context for a discussion of teacher burnout and subsequent attrition. Four discrete challenges facing public school teachers were identified in this literature review: student needs in the classroom, accountability measures, public perceptions of the teaching profession, and compensation. These challenges are pervasive in American schools and are likely contributing to the crisis of teacher burnout.

Student Needs in the Classroom

The needs of students have become increasingly complex and overwhelming, and teachers feel ill-equipped to meet these needs (Kotowski et al., 2022). Even prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, teaching was one of the most stressful jobs in America, and the pandemic only further compounded and exacerbated the challenges teachers were facing in the classroom (Kotowski et al., 2022; Steiner & Woo, 2021; Theberath et al., 2022). Job-related stress is commonly associated with feelings of burnout and symptoms of depression (Steiner & Woo, 2021). These issues appear to be indiscriminate, experienced by teachers across all demographics and instructional contexts (such as school location), although female teachers reported higher

levels of stress than male teachers (Steiner & Woo, 2021). The reality of teacher shortages has forced state agencies to establish processes that allow school districts to hire individuals who have not completed a teacher preparation program and/or who are not fully licensed. These individuals are permitted to teach as a result of temporary or emergency authorizations; however, they are even less equipped to meet the demands of today's classrooms than teachers who have completed a preparation program.

In general, workplace stressors have intensified, and the skill set required of teachers to meet the needs of learners has grown increasingly complex (Landsbergis et al., 2020). Students bring a wide range of social and emotional experiences to the classroom, and these experiences impact their ability to engage and learn. As a result, teachers must also be equipped to integrate appropriate strategies to help students grow socially and emotionally (Beymer et al., 2023; Darling-Hammond & Hyler, 2020).

The mental health needs of students have become significantly more complex and demanding for teachers. The most pervasive mental health needs include depression, anxiety, behavior problems, attention and hyperactivity issues, and social skills deficits, and reports now commonly cite that up to 20%-25% of school-aged children in the United States have a mental health issue that may impact school performance (Deaton et al., 2022; Ormiston et al., 2021). The prevalence of mental health conditions in adolescents is even higher; between 30% and 40% of adolescents in the United States have a mental health diagnosis (Firestone & Cruz, 2022).

Unfortunately, the lockdown measures taken as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic only further aggravated the stability and mental health of children and adolescents (Theberath et al., 2022). Measures taken to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 disrupted typical development as social interactions were greatly impacted and new stressors were introduced, causing a variety of

physical and psychological implications including sleep problems, loneliness, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress (Therebath et al., 2022). In a survey conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics during the 2021-2022 school year, public school leaders reported overwhelmingly (by selecting agree or strongly agree) that the COVID-19 pandemic had negatively impacted both students' social-emotional development and students' behavioral development, 87% and 84% respectively (NCES, 2022).

Many students who need mental health support do not receive the services that they need; in fact, at any given time, between 50% and 80% of students who should be receiving services are not (Ormiston et al., 2021). For many of these students, the school becomes the de facto primary source of support, and teachers are often the ones to provide the support even though they are not trained clinicians (Ormiston et al., 2021). They are routinely expected to provide support ranging from prevention to intervention, and because they spend considerable time with students and develop meaningful relationships with students, they often function as first responders or frontline personnel (Deaton et al., 2022; Firestone & Cruz, 2022; Huck & Zhang, 2021). Within a classroom, teachers often face a myriad of mental health needs, and they consistently report lacking knowledge, preparation, and confidence to support student needs (Deaton et al., 2022; Ormiston et al., 2021).

Closely related to mental health needs, and sometimes overlapping, is the reality of students with special needs. Most classrooms include students with a variety of special needs, ranging from emotional and behavioral to academic. Classroom teachers are not trained specifically to meet these needs, and they frequently cite a lack of training and confidence in supporting these learners (Gilmour et al., 2022; McCullough et al., 2022). Students with behavioral issues are particularly challenging for teachers, and some estimates report that as

many as 30% of students present behavioral issues of some sort (McCullough et al., 2022). In the 2021-2022 school year, approximately 15% of public school students qualified for and received special education services under the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act legislation (National Center for Education Statistics, 2023). This translates to 7.3 million students, and most general education teachers teach students with disabilities for at least a portion of their day (Gilmour, 2022; National Center for Education Statistics, 2023).

Past research demonstrates that students with emotional/behavioral disorders, autism, or learning disabilities have the strongest associations with teacher stress and burnout (Gilmour, 2022), and of the 7.3 million students receiving special education services in 2021-2022, 49% were in these categories — 32 percent learning disabilities; 12 percent autism; five percent emotional disturbance (National Center for Education Statistics, 2023). Teachers feel the weight of the responsibility to meet student needs, which contributes to the job-related stress and emotional exhaustion that they oftentimes experience (Deaton et al., 2022; Ormiston et al., 2021). They recognize the important role they play in supporting student needs but lack training to help them manage their own emotions and develop effective coping strategies as they seek to meet the needs of their students (Deaton et al., 2022).

Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on Students' Learning. The social-emotional, behavioral, and mental health issues discussed thus far represent substantial, and sometimes overwhelming, challenges for teachers; however, the reality of students' learning loss as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic is yet another substantial burden for teachers (Dorn et al., 2020; Zhdanov et al., 2022). School closures are not a new phenomenon. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, schools had to close for unforeseen reasons such as natural disasters or teacher strikes as well as for planned reasons including summer breaks, and research has shown that closures for

even a limited time can result in learning loss (Zhdanov et al., 2022).

In the spring of 2020, nearly all schools in the country experienced some form of a shutdown due to the pandemic. This was arguably the most significant disruption to education in recent history, and there was an immediate and alarming impact on student academic performance. Assessment data from the fall of 2020, just a few months after the school shutdowns, showed students began the school year an average of three months behind in math and a month and a half behind in reading (Dorn et al., 2020). Data from the 2020–2021 school year confirmed the significance of the disruption to student learning; although student performance showed growth throughout the year, the average growth lagged behind expected and typical growth (Kuhfeld et al., 2022).

As noted in Chapter 1, the 2022 data from the NAEP, also known as “The Nation’s Report Card,” confirmed the reality of the decline in students’ achievement. Specifically, the reading scores for both fourth-grade and eighth-grade students dropped an average of three points in 2022 as compared to 2019 (U.S. Department of Education, 2022). The 2022 fourth-grade scores were the lowest since 2005 and the 2022 eighth-grade scores were the lowest since 1998. The math scores showed a similar trend, with an average decline of five points for fourth-grade students as compared to 2019 (the lowest since 2005) and an average decline of eight points for eighth-grade students as compared to 2019 NAEP scores (the lowest since 2003). National Star assessment data showed similar results (Renaissance Learning, 2022). Star data were analyzed from 4.4 million students in reading and 2.9 million students in math and in both content areas student performance was lower when comparing 2021-2022 data to the prior year, 2020–2021. The data also showed that student growth rates between fall and winter administrations lagged behind pre-COVID-19 growth rates.

This data has significant implications for teachers. It means that many students are not able to successfully access grade-level content and as a result, teachers must teach content from the prior grade level. This further complicates the instructional demands placed on teachers, as they may not have experience teaching earlier grades and in some cases they do not have appropriate curriculum materials to deliver the needed content. While many students were negatively impacted in their academic performance, there continue to be students, albeit fewer students, achieving at or above grade level, so the reality is that the range of academic performance and subsequent need for differentiation expands for teachers.

A subtext within learning loss relates to increased student absenteeism as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Student survey responses on the 2023 NAEP administration showed an increase in the number of 13-year-old students who had missed three or four days of school in the prior month, and the number of students who had missed five or more days doubled, from 5% in 2020 to 10% in 2023 (U.S. Department of Education, 2023). Additionally, during the 2021-2022 school year, 72% of public schools reported experiencing increased chronic absenteeism, defined as missing 10% or more of the school year (NCES, 2022). This may seem to be an inconsequential variable, yet the reality in the life of a teacher may be significant. Students with stronger attendance performed better on both the reading and math assessments (U.S. Department of Education, 2023). As such, there are real implications for teachers who must work to get these students caught up following absences. Unstable student attendance creates further burdens for teachers as they plan and deliver instruction, monitor and assess growth, and communicate with students and families about missed work or assessments.

Teaching has always been a demanding profession (Landsbergis et al., 2020). There have always been challenges relating to meeting individual student needs, effectively managing

classroom behavior, differentiating instruction to maximize academic growth, and learning new curriculum and technology tools, to name just a few. Now in the post-pandemic reality, the demands have grown substantially, and teachers face additional challenges that only make the requisite skill set even more complex. The COVID-19 pandemic only further compounded and introduced more challenges into an already complex and concerning reality (Kotowski et al., 2022). Uncertainty about school operations (e.g., remote learning), concerns about increased learning losses and students' achievement gaps, and questions about student mental health needs are leading to both increased teacher demand and decreased teacher supply (Lachlan et al., 2020). In a survey conducted of over 2,000 public school teachers, only 29% agreed or strongly agreed that the expectations placed on teachers were reasonable (Hanks et al., 2020).

Accountability Measures

In addition to the individual needs that students present within the classroom, teachers are also responsible for meeting numerous requirements from outside the classroom. The publication of *A Nation at Risk* in 1983 led to a significant shift in the public discourse around K–12 education, clearly linking the success of the economy to the success of the education system (Wright, 2020). Since then, and in particular over the past 30 years, accountability measures and public scrutiny of schools and teachers have significantly increased (Ryan et al., 2017).

The federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act in 2001 imposed new metrics for determining student success, including test scores in grades 3-8 for reading and math, designations of “adequate yearly progress” based on student performance and publicly available school report cards, designations of “highly qualified” teachers, and school closures and job loss for low-performing schools or teachers (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Ryan et al., 2017; Weiss & McGuinn, 2017).

Following NCLB, the federal government passed the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), which sought to relax some of the high-stakes accountability measures by incentivizing reforms driven by state education agencies (Weiss & McGuinn, 2017). The net effect, however, was continued pressure on many of the same accountability measures as NCLB, but now with a greater reliance on states to achieve the reforms, and not surprisingly many states were ill-equipped to implement the reforms (Ryan et. al, 2017; Weiss & McGuinn, 2017). State education agencies vary greatly in terms of their degree of centralized policies and oversight, including standards and curriculum, data collection, reporting, and numerous other accountability measures (Weiss & McGuinn, 2017). Thus, local school districts have had very disparate experiences both within and across states in terms of accountability measures in recent years.

While content standards have long been part of the teaching profession, both federal and state legislation have heightened teachers' concerns about "teaching to the test" rather than meeting the unique needs of students in a teacher's classroom (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). Many teachers experience a sense of diminished autonomy, as they are not able to exercise discretion in terms of the pacing, depth, or selection of the curriculum or assessments given to students (e.g., formative assessments versus high-stakes tests) based on the needs of their own students (Aronson et al., 2021). Rather, teachers are often subject to standardized curricula, imposed timelines and pacing expectations, and the ever-present fear of high-stakes testing and public reporting (Aronson et al., 2021; Greenberg et al., 2016).

These accountability measures have impacted teachers greatly. The increased scrutiny and public discussion about linking individual student performance to individual teachers has created a high-stakes environment for teachers, and teachers have experienced greater degrees of

stress and anxiety as a result (Kim et al., 2017; Ryan et al., 2017). Teachers cite multiple reasons for leaving the profession, including retirement, family or personal reasons, and financial reasons, but the top reason cited is dissatisfaction (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). Within the category of dissatisfaction, the pressure associated with student testing and public accountability is reported as the highest concern (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). Dissatisfaction with accountability policies such as testing ranks among the top reasons teachers cite as extremely or very important in their decision to leave the profession (Learning Policy Institute, 2017). A vicious cycle exists, wherein teachers who experience stress relating to accountability measures are less likely to foster strong learning communities, and as a result, both student academic growth and student behavior are negatively impacted (Greenberg et al., 2016; Kim et al., 2017).

Whereas high-stakes testing focuses on the growth and performance of students, evaluation systems focus on the performance of individual teachers. School principals are typically responsible for conducting evaluations, and the effectiveness and fidelity of the evaluations are subject to principals' implementation (Derrington & Kirk, 2017). There are often dual purposes at work within evaluation systems, including both summative and formative purposes (Tuytens et al., 2020). A summative purpose is an accountability measure focusing on judgments of teachers' past performance and as such carries high-stakes implications (e.g., contract renewal). In contrast, a formative purpose is intended to support teachers' continued growth and professional development (Derrington & Kirk, 2017; Tuytens et al., 2020). Achieving both purposes well within one system can be difficult. Evaluation systems are often received by teachers as inauthentic, and specific practices such as parent and student surveys may actually exacerbate the issues that the systems are intended to resolve (Hanks et al., 2020).

Because the landscape of teacher evaluations has changed significantly over time and varies greatly between states, teachers lack confidence in these systems and principals report that these evaluation systems have eroded teacher morale (Paufler, 2018), and as such this reality is likely contributing to the problem of teacher attrition.

Finally, as public employees, teachers are subject to numerous regulations and systems that govern their employment. Many human resource processes and decisions that impact teachers fall outside of managers' purview (e.g., the school principal), including compensation and processes for performance evaluations and dismissal (Grissom et al., 2015). This environment, coupled with the public accountability measures, has resulted in a highly regulated teaching profession. Unlike many other professions, there are few opportunities for recognition of superior work through monetary bonuses or merit pay. The ironic and unintended outcome is a deprofessionalization of teachers' work, meaning that much of the work has been standardized and individual discretion, autonomy, and recognition have diminished (Aronson et al., 2021). While the regulations and accountability measures may be well-intended, the reality is that these regulatory infrastructures have taken a heavy toll on today's teaching force.

Public Perceptions of the Teaching Profession

In an attempt to address the teacher shortage issues, some states have included strategies to rebrand the image of the teaching profession (McHenry-Sorber & Campbell, 2019). However teachers' unions themselves have been vilified, with narratives about protecting bad teachers and seeking unjustified pay increases (Wright, 2020). In particular, during teacher strikes, the public rhetoric often pits teacher demands against student needs (Wright, 2020). Although the reality is that many factors outside teachers' control have significant impact on students' achievement (e.g., income inequality), teachers are often blamed for poor student outcomes (Hanks et al.,

2020).

Survey data from two long-standing public polls shed light on public perceptions of the teaching profession. The Harris Poll Prestige ratings and Phi Delta Kappan/Gallup polls have generated data since the 1970s, and analysis of the data over time shows a rise in perceptions of prestige in the teaching profession through the 1980s and into the 1990s. Prestige perceptions remained relatively stable from the 1990s until the 2010s; by 2022 only 59% of respondents considered teaching to have “considerable prestige” as a profession (Kraft & Lyon, 2022). The surveys also asked parents whether they wanted their children to become teachers and similarly, the data showed significant change in perceptions over time, from the peak response of 65% of parents wanting their child to be teachers in 1993 to the lowest recorded level of just 37% in 2022 (Kraft & Lyon, 2022).

The COVID-19 pandemic further compounded existing challenges for teachers. During a time of great uncertainty, teachers were placed squarely at the center of divisive issues, including masking, vaccine requirements, and home learning (Diliberti & Schwartz, 2022). Regardless of how individual teachers felt about these matters, they were subject to passionate and often heated responses from families. Similar to responses during the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers are subject to the political climate of their school or district. Topics such as critical race theory and gender curricula are hotly debated and as a result, parental trust has eroded (Diliberti & Schwartz, 2022). Heated public exchanges between parents and local school boards and vilification of public schools in the media have become more common, only adding to teacher demoralization and further eroding teachers’ perceptions of their professional status (Aronson et al., 2021).

In addition to increasingly negative perceptions about the teaching profession itself,

surveys that probe perceptions of public schools as institutions have similarly become more negative. According to the 2023 Schooling in America survey conducted by EdChoice, American pessimism about public schools is higher than any other year in their 11 years of administering this survey, with 70% of respondents selecting that K–12 education is on the “wrong track” (Kristof et al., 2023). Conversely, the belief that K–12 education is moving in the “right direction” was at a near low of 27%; 2016 was the only year with a lower confidence rating, at 24%, and only one other year, 2017, had the same low rating of 27%.

In a national Gallup poll conducted in August of 2022, only 42% of Americans reported being satisfied with the quality of K–12 education in the country (Saad, 2022). This was the lowest level of satisfaction in two decades and was a decline from pre-COVID-19 surveys, where satisfaction was 51% in 2019. However, another post-COVID survey conducted in June 2022 by Phi Delta Kappan showed an increase in support for local schools, with 54% giving a grade of A or B to their local public schools (Phi Delta Kappan, 2022). However a closer look at the data showed that the increased confidence was generated by non-parents, while K–12 public school parent ratings decreased. Further, when asked about the nation’s schools rather than their local schools, the responses were far less positive, with grades of A or B from 23% of all adults and 30% of public school parents.

Finally, according to data gathered by the Pew Research Center, confidence in public school principals declined significantly in just three years (Kennedy et al., 2022). In December 2018, 80% of respondents reported either a fair amount or a great deal of confidence in public school principals. In April 2020, favorable confidence reached a high of 83%, but by December 2021, favorable confidence reached a low of 64%, with 35% of respondents citing their confidence as “not too much” or “no confidence at all” (Kennedy et al., 2022). This survey was

specific to school principals, but teachers are also implicated as a function of being part of the broader school system.

Survey data provides insight into the current views of the teaching profession, and unfortunately, the themes emerging in recent years about the profession are largely critical. Public perceptions have cast a negative light on the profession, and the fact that there is a significant national teacher shortage only raises more questions and further erodes the reputation of the profession (Garcia & Weiss, 2019). These realities have further compounded the daily challenges that teachers face.

Teacher Compensation

Teacher compensation is frequently a focal point of discussions regarding the teacher shortage. It is important to note that compensation is a broad term encompassing several types of benefits including salary, as well as health (medical, dental) benefits and retirement benefits (Grissom et al., 2015). While recognizing this broad reality, the focus of this discussion is on salary as the most significant component within compensation.

Public school teachers are public employees. When looking broadly at data gathered on public sector employees, there is a clear association between higher pay and lower turnover, and the same holds true when looking at public school teachers (Grissom et al., 2015). Pay is an important variable in both attracting teachers and retaining teachers (Garcia et al., 2022; Sutchter et al., 2019). Various analyses of teacher salaries over time have shown slightly different effects, but the common theme is that they have either stagnated or declined, not increased. For example, using state-reported data in 2019, teacher salaries declined by 1.7% in constant dollars between 1989-1990 and 2016-2017 (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019). Using inflation-adjusted data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the Economic Policy Institute has

shown that average weekly teacher wages have been largely flat for the past 25 years (Allegretto, 2022). Additionally, data from the Economic Policy Institute showed that the gap between teacher wages and the wages of nonteacher college-educated counterparts has grown significantly; adjusting for inflation, in 2021 teachers' average weekly wages were 32.9% less than their counterparts (Allegretto, 2022).

Compensation is a significant variable in teacher attrition. Given the known reality that teaching is a high-stress profession, it is surprising that teacher salaries are lower than professions with similar education levels (Steiner & Woo, 2021). Data gathered from the Bureau of Labor Statistics between 2011 and 2015 showed that, on average, teachers' wages were 77% of what their college-graduate peers earned annually. In 18 states the wages were more than 25% lower, and only five states showed a difference of less than 10% (Allegretto & Mishel, 2016). Nearly 20% of teachers leaving the profession prior to the COVID-19 pandemic cited financial reasons as an important factor in their decision (Steiner & Woo, 2021). Similarly, teachers who left teaching as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic most frequently cited that the pay was not sufficient considering the risks or stress of the job as their reason for leaving (Diliberti et al., 2021; Steiner & Woo, 2021). Younger teachers (under 40) cited this more than older teachers (over 40). Teachers are acutely aware of the opportunity cost of entering and remaining in the profession (Allegretto & Mishel, 2018). In a survey conducted of over 2,000 public school teachers, while only 57% agreed that teachers are not paid well, 85% of the teachers reported that salary was an "important" or "very important" variable as they considered whether to remain in the profession (Hanks et al., 2020).

All too often, teachers supplement their teaching salary in other ways. In data generated by the National Center for Education Statistics in 2017-2018, 6 out of 10 public school teachers

supplemented their income with second jobs, either within their school system (e.g., coaching, curriculum work, tutoring) or in non-school-based environments (NCES, n.d.b). Subsequent research in 2020 by the RAND American Educator Panels yielded similar results, with half of the teachers supplementing their income with a second job (Diliberti et al., 2021).

Another consideration relates again to the fact that teaching is demanding work, and as a result, teachers commonly work more than the expected number of hours stated in their teaching contract. This presents two particular challenges for teachers. First, given that their compensation is low relative to other college-educated professions, they may believe that they should maintain the contracted number of hours; it is more difficult to justify additional investment of time for low pay (Beymer et al., 2023). Secondly, many teachers still choose to invest hours beyond their contracts but because most school systems use some form of a fixed salary schedule based on education and years of experience, there is no means to reward teachers monetarily for their additional commitment and effort (Gicheva, 2022). These systems and structures do not recognize the individual contributions of teachers and do not incentivize teachers to persist in the profession.

The Role of School Principals

Principals are uniquely positioned within schools to support teachers, to intervene, and to mitigate the negative effects of the stressors and demands that teachers face. The central purpose of this study is to identify specific types of support that principals can provide to assuage the effects of the challenges facing teachers, which may in turn reduce burnout and ultimately reduce attrition.

Teaching can be emotionally taxing work, given the social and interpersonal demands, the stress of the job, and the unpredictability of day-to-day situations (Collie et al., 2018). As

such, emotional exhaustion among teachers is common. However, teachers who report having a supportive supervisor or principal are less likely to report emotional exhaustion (Collie et al., 2018). Teachers report that feeling supported by their administrator is very important to them (Reitman & Karge, 2019; Whipp & Geronime, 2017). Not surprisingly, the converse is also true. Teachers who report dissatisfaction with their administrator have higher rates of attrition (Reitman & Karge, 2019; Whipp & Geronime, 2017). A critically important extension of this research is to seek to understand what constitutes having a “supportive” principal from a teacher’s perspective.

Prior research has provided broad recommendations to strengthen teacher retention, including developing strong relationships and trust, cultivating professional working environments, and providing support (Finster, 2015; Grissom et al., 2015; Player et al., 2017; Podolsky et al., 2016). In other research, more specific actions are identified, but amidst the many daily demands on school principals, it is unclear which of these actions might yield the strongest impact on retaining teachers. For example, the current body of research suggests that principals should provide time for peer collaboration, provide opportunities for leadership and shared decision-making, provide opportunities for teachers to visit and observe colleagues teaching, ensure that teachers have sufficient and appropriate resources and materials, and articulate a clear vision (Berry et al., 2021; Darling-Hammond, 2022; Finster, 2015; Learning Policy Institute, 2017).

All of these recommended actions very well may be valuable in a school community, but they lack a clear connection to teacher burnout and how principals might utilize specific actions to mitigate burnout, or better yet to prevent the initial stages and symptoms of burnout from taking root. Equipping principals with an understanding of burnout in conjunction with strategies

may strengthen their ability to target their responses, either in individual situations when they discern that a teacher may be at risk of burnout or in a school culture that may be contributing to a culture of burnout.

Presuming that there are indeed specific actions that might stem the current tide of attrition and strengthen teacher retention, the reality is that any new actions would not exist in a vacuum. Rather, there is a well-established paradigm already in place for both the preparation of school principals and for their professional responsibilities and expectations once hired. This section will explore the typical duties and responsibilities of the job, the preparation and licensure requirements to enter the profession, and common ongoing professional development practices and focus areas after being hired as a principal. A clear understanding of the current paradigm is needed so that any recommendations can be situated within this context and can be viewed through a lens of potential viability.

Typical Duties and Responsibilities

There is not a singular, shared definition of what it means to be a school principal, but there are several national sources that coalesce around common ideas. Federal legislation governing public K–12 education in America between 2017–2018 and 2020–2021 was the Every Student Succeeds Act (2015). In this legislation, “school leaders” was a broad term used to encompass principals, assistant principals, and others who are “responsible for the daily instructional leadership and managerial operations in the elementary school or secondary school building” (Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015, p. 44).

According to the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics (2023b), school principals at all levels (elementary, middle, and high school) are responsible for overseeing all of a school’s operations, including daily activities within the school. The Bureau of Labor Statistics also

provided a summary of the duties of a school principal, which is a long list of wide-ranging responsibilities:

- Manage school activities and staff, including teachers and support personnel,
- Establish and oversee class schedules,
- Develop, implement, and maintain curriculum standards,
- Counsel and discipline students,
- Observe teachers and evaluate their performance,
- Meet with parents and teachers to discuss students' progress and behavior,
- Assess and prepare reports on test scores and other students' achievement data,
- Organize professional development programs and workshops for staff,
- Manage the school's budget, order school supplies, and schedule maintenance,
- Establish and coordinate security procedures for students, staff, and visitors. (p. 1)

As demonstrated by this summary of responsibilities, the expectations of a school principal are extensive.

Professional organizations representing school principals echo the themes set forth by federal agencies. The National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP, 2023) defined principals as “the primary instructional leaders in the schools and communities in which they serve” (p. 2). In addition to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, NAESP provided another substantial list of responsibilities:

- Decisions for personnel assignment,
- Staff evaluation,
- Expenditure of funds/budget and resource allocation,
- Discipline,

- Curriculum design and implementation,
- Program and staff development. (pp. 2,4)

The NAESP further qualified this list as incomplete within the entire scope of elementary school principals' responsibilities.

Similarly, in their Statement of Values, the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP, 2023) provided an expansive view of the role of a school principal, stating that:

The principal is the school's leader and promotes equity and excellence in education for each student. The leader is vital to every aspect of education - academics, the arts, athletics, cocurricular activities, and general administration. ... As the instructional leader of the school the principal promotes the success of all students by facilitating the development, articulation, implementation and stewardship of a vision of learning that the principal develops in cooperation with the school community. The principal strives to make schools a positive learning environment by setting high expectations for each student and teacher. The principal is also the manager of the school, responsible for the legal, fiscal, and operational functions that provide an infrastructure for learning. (p. 1)

This definition places the school principal squarely at the center of a school's health and success. In this way, the NASSP definition closely mirrors the previous definitions. Although there are differences between the definitions, the unifying theme is that the job of a school principal has many facets and bears significant responsibility in the life and success of the school.

Professional Standards

The definitions and descriptions noted above make clear that the role of a school principal is both wide-ranging and demanding. It is important, therefore, to explore the question

of how principals are prepared and equipped for the demands of the role. The Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL) was published by the National Policy Board for Educational Administration in 2015 and serves as a resource to understand the role of school principals. This set of standards is strongly focused on students' achievement, asserting that principals "must approach every teacher evaluation, every interaction with the central office, every analysis of data with one question always in mind: How will this help our students excel as learners?" (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015, p. 3). With this question as the central focus for principals, the PSEL sets forth 83 individual professional standards within the following 10 domains:

1. Mission, Vision, and Core Values,
2. Ethics and Professional Norms,
3. Equity and Cultural Responsiveness,
4. Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment,
5. Community of Care and Support for Students,
6. Professional Capacity of School Personnel,
7. Professional Community for Teachers and Staff,
8. Meaningful Engagement of Families and Community,
9. Operations and Management,
10. School Improvement. (2015, p. 3)

The domain entitled Professional Capacity of School Personnel is further defined to state that "effective educational leaders develop the capacity and practices of school personnel to promote each student's success and well-being" (p. 14). The sub-heading for the next domain, titled Professional Community for Teachers and Staff, states that "effective educational leaders foster a

professional community of teachers and other professional staff to promote each student's academic success and well-being" (p. 15). The focus within these domains is solidly on students' achievement, and there is a clear presumption that teachers are the means to that end. However, both of these domains also have language to help orient principals to the importance of their interactions with teachers, including language about supporting teachers, induction and mentoring new teachers, differentiated opportunities for learning and growth, actionable feedback about instruction, promoting personal and professional health, well-being, and work-life balance, providing collaborative learning opportunities, and attending to workplace conditions.

The PSEL standards offer an encouraging recognition of the significant role that school principals play in supporting their teaching staff. These standards have the potential to powerfully inform both the professional organizations serving currently employed school principals as well as states and entities responsible for the preparation of future principals. These standards are not currently required by a federal governing or regulatory body. Rather, the PSEL standards serve as recommendations and best practices for states to consider as they establish their state-specific standards and requirements to license school principals. Given this reality, the next reasonable question is whether the PSEL standards relating to supporting teachers are reflected in state-level preparation and licensure requirements.

Preparation and Licensure Requirements

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2023b), each state has established specific licensure requirements, which typically include a requirement that principals must have several years of prior teaching experience and that they must hold a master's degree in educational administration or leadership. Additionally, many states require individuals to pass an exam and a

background check. Principals are prepared and licensed through state-approved programs, and each state has its own set of unique professional standards and licensure requirements. In Minnesota, where this study is being written, individuals seeking to become licensed school principals must have at least three years of experience as a licensed teacher or as a licensed school-based support personnel including social worker, psychologist, counselor, or speech-language pathologist (Minnesota Administrative Rules, 2020a). Prospective principals must complete 320 hours of field experience across elementary, middle, and high schools. The following analysis does not provide an exhaustive review of the requirements in every state, but rather provides a sampling of requirements across several regions of the country. Within the requirements, the focus is on the licensing standards, which serve as the basis for approving licensure programs and the subsequent coursework that aspiring principals must successfully complete. This sampling includes states from a variety of regions throughout the country and reveals that there is substantial variation across states in terms of alignment with the PSEL standards specific to supporting teachers.

Several states include language that either closely or somewhat aligns with the PSEL language recognizing the importance of supporting teachers. In Iowa, for example, individuals must meet the Iowa Standards for School Leaders (ISSL) and two of the domains reflect the PSEL standards noted above (School Administrators of Iowa, n.d.); there is close alignment between the ISSL and PSEL in terms of recognizing a school principal's role in effectively supporting teachers. In Oregon, prospective principals must meet the standards set forth in administrative rule, which includes four standards under the heading of Human Resource Leadership (Oregon Teacher Standards and Practices Commission, 2022). While these standards do not mirror the PSEL language as closely as Iowa's standards, the standards include references

that arguably reflect the spirit of the PSEL standards. For example, the standards include language about professional culture, workplace conditions, and mentoring.

In Texas, there are five broad categories of standards, one of which is Human Capital. Within this standard, there are discrete indicators (or sub-standards) that orient principals to teacher growth and health, including tailored development, feedback, coaching, and staff collaboration and leadership (Texas Education Agency, 2023). In New York, the Board of Regents has adopted a requirement for all “school building leader” programs to align with PSEL, with some state-specific modifications, by the 2024-2025 school year (New York State Education Department, 2023).

The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (2018) developed a series of standards, indicators, and detailed rubrics as part of their Massachusetts Model System for Educator Evaluation. Within the standards, indicators, and rubrics, there are connections to the PSEL language focusing on supporting teachers, including a goal that a principal “makes frequent unannounced visits to classrooms and gives targeted and constructive feedback to teachers” (p. 4) as well as goals around “induction, professional development, and career growth strategies.” (p. 12)

In several other states, references to PSEL concepts can be found, but the references are vague, unqualified, or oriented toward a different purpose. For example, the Illinois standards include a domain called Improving Teaching and Learning. Within this domain, one of the indicators requires principals to evaluate “the effectiveness of instruction and of individual teachers by conducting frequent formal and informal observations providing timely feedback on instruction as part of the district teacher appraisal system” (Illinois State Board of Education, n.d., p. 7).

In contrast, the related PSEL standard calls principals to “deliver actionable feedback about instruction and other professional practice through valid, research-anchored systems of supervision and evaluation to support the development of teachers’ and staff members’ knowledge, skills, and practice” (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015, p. 14). The difference may appear insignificant at first, but the language is powerful in terms of orienting principals to the underlying purposes and priorities. Whereas the Illinois language orients principals toward compliance with an appraisal system, the PSEL language orients principals toward teacher growth and development as professionals.

South Dakota’s standards include two references to fostering teacher leadership: “Utilizing the skills of staff and encouraging staff to assume leadership roles within the school to improve teaching and learning” and “Developing the capacity of staff to serve as leaders within the school, maximizing both ownership and accountability” (South Dakota Department of Education, 2017, p. 3). In contrast to the PSEL standards specific to teacher leadership, the South Dakota standards lack clarity and purpose; the PSEL standards arguably project a stronger and more compelling professional purpose, to “develop the capacity, opportunities, and support for teacher leadership” (2015, p. 20) and to “develop and promote leadership among teachers and staff for inquiry, experimentation and innovation, and initiating and implementing improvement” (2015, p. 24). Here again, the difference in language may seem inconsequential, but the South Dakota language lacks the richness of the PSEL language, which invites principals into a mindset of developing teachers as unique contributors within their schools.

Finally, in Minnesota, aspiring principals must successfully complete coursework from an accredited institution where the coursework is aligned with two sets of core leadership competencies (Minnesota Administrative Rules, 2020b). The first set of competencies must be

demonstrated by individuals seeking licensure as a superintendent, principal, special education director, or community education director. There are 12 competency areas within these shared administrative requirements, including leadership, organizational management, equity and culturally responsive leadership, policy and law, political influence and governance, communication, community relations, curriculum, instruction, and assessment, human resource management, values and ethics, judgment and problem analysis, and safety and security. Within these 12 areas, there are 71 discrete standards.

Beyond the 12 shared competency areas, there are three competency areas required for those specifically seeking principal licensure: instructional leadership, monitoring student learning, and prekindergarten through grade 12 leadership. There are 15 standards across these three additional areas. In total, aspiring school principals in Minnesota must demonstrate competence in 86 standards across 15 domains, but there is very little language in any of the standards that mirror the PSEL standards that relate to supporting teachers. Whereas it initially looks promising to have a set of competencies specific to human resource management, unfortunately this domain is largely focused on legal and technical understanding such as labor relations, contracts and benefits, legal requirements of personnel selection, development, retention, and dismissal.

As demonstrated in this sampling of state requirements, there is great variability amongst states in preparing the pipeline of new principals. The PSEL provide a strong framework, but these standards are reflected unevenly across the country. As a result, there continues to be significant differences in the preparation of school principals and their understanding of how to support teachers well.

Conclusion

There are persistent and complex challenges facing the teaching profession that are contributing to the crisis of teacher burnout. This chapter explored four substantial challenges in the current literature. First, the demands of teaching are immense, and the needs of individual students have only become more intense, particularly since the COVID-19 pandemic. Second, in addition to the challenges within the classroom, teachers are burdened by external accountability measures, including standardized testing. Third, teachers face increased public scrutiny and an overall decline in the American public's regard for the teaching profession. A fourth and final challenge is low compensation, as teacher salaries have stagnated and are not competitive relative to similar professions requiring a college degree.

Because of their daily proximity and opportunities for connections with teachers, school principals may be able to help mitigate these challenges. Research in this literature review shows that the demands placed on school principals are also significant, with wide-ranging responsibilities and duties. Given this reality, principals must be specifically trained and oriented to the priority of strengthening teacher retention. The PSEL provide a valuable starting point for orienting principals to this work. However, there is great variability within the standards currently used by states to prepare and license school principals, and in many states there remains an insufficient focus on the role of the school principal as a means to preventing teacher burnout and strengthening teacher retention.

The hypotheses set forth in this study sought to explore teachers' perceptions of specific actions by their school principals, and most importantly, the impact those perceptions have on their intentions to remain in the profession.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Purpose of the Study

School principals' daily proximity to teachers' work provides them with a window of insight and understanding into the demands of teaching as well as an opportunity for ongoing relationship and engagement. Their role uniquely positions principals to engage with teachers in meaningful ways, to address challenges, and to provide support in ways that might engender a deeper commitment for teachers to persist in the profession. Toward that end, this quantitative study explored how school principals can leverage their role to strengthen teachers' retention, and in particular, how they might interrupt the trend of teachers leaving the profession within the first 5 years.

This study analyzed whether there are significant differences in early career elementary teachers' intentions to remain in their positions based upon their perceptions of their principals' support. Using data from the 2020–2021 National Teacher and Principal Survey (NTPS), this study isolated public elementary school teachers who were in their first 5 years of teaching. The first set of analyses used survey data in which teachers provided information on their first year of teaching and their perceptions of receiving supportive communication and feedback from their principals. The second set of analyses used survey data in which teachers reflected on their current teaching position and perceptions of receiving support from their principals. For both sets of responses, the analyses focused on the relationship between teachers' perceptions of receiving support from their principals and their intentions to continue teaching.

These analyses generated additional understanding about the significance of principals' roles and how to best utilize principals in the early years of teachers' careers. The relationship between teachers' perceptions of support received from principals and their intentions to persist

in teaching may offer insights into the work and priorities of school principals and whether there are specific actions such as certain types of communication or feedback that school principals can take within the course of day-to-day school operations that may contribute to increased teachers' retention and alter the current state of the teacher shortage.

Principals have the opportunity to interact with teachers on a daily basis; therefore, they are uniquely positioned to implement strategies that could disrupt the pipeline of teachers leaving the profession. By identifying specific actions or strategies, this analysis may provide critical and actionable information to alter the trajectory of teacher retention.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

This study examined five questions within two categories, as well as a null hypothesis and an alternative hypothesis for each of the five research questions. The first two research questions focused on teachers' first year of teaching; the remaining three research questions focused on teachers' current year of teaching.

Research Question #1: Is there a statistically significant ($p < .05$) difference in elementary teachers' intent to remain in the teaching profession based on their perceptions of having received supportive communication from principals or other administrators during the first year of teaching?

H₀: There is no difference in elementary teachers' intent to remain in the teaching profession based on their perceptions of having received supportive communication from principals or other administrators during the first year of teaching.

H_a: There is a difference in elementary teachers' intent to remain in the teaching profession based on their perceptions of having received supportive communication from principals or other administrators during the first year of teaching.

Research Question #2: Is there a statistically significant ($p < .05$) difference in elementary teachers' intent to remain in the teaching profession based on their perceptions of having received meaningful feedback beyond formal evaluations during the first year of teaching?

Ho2: There is no difference in elementary teachers' intent to remain in the teaching profession based on their perceptions of having received meaningful feedback beyond formal evaluations during the first year of teaching.

Ha2: There is a difference in elementary teachers' intent to remain in the teaching profession based on their perceptions of having received meaningful feedback beyond formal evaluations during the first year of teaching.

Research Question #3: Is there a statistically significant ($p < .05$) difference in elementary teachers' intent to remain in the teaching profession based on their perceptions of their school administrators' behavior as supportive and encouraging?

Ho3: There is no difference in elementary teachers' intent to remain in the teaching profession based on their perceptions of school administrators' behavior as supportive and encouraging.

Ha3: There is a difference in elementary teachers' intent to remain in the teaching profession based on their perceptions of school administrators' behavior as supportive and encouraging.

Research Question #4: Is there a statistically significant ($p < .05$) difference in elementary teachers' intent to remain in the teaching profession based on their perceptions of their school principals enforcing school rules and supporting teachers?

Ho4: There is no difference in elementary teachers' intent to remain in the teaching

profession based on their perceptions of the school principal enforcing school rules for student conduct and supporting the teacher.

Ha4: There is a difference in elementary teachers' intent to remain in the teaching profession based on their perceptions of the school principal enforcing school rules for student conduct and supporting the teacher.

Research Question #5: Is there a statistically significant ($p < .05$) difference in elementary teachers' intent to remain in the teaching profession based on their perceptions of their school principals' having a vision and communicating it to the staff?

Ho5: There is no difference in elementary teachers' intent to remain in the teaching profession based on their perceptions of the school principal having a vision and communicating it to the staff.

Ha5: There is a difference in elementary teachers' intent to remain in the teaching profession based on their perceptions of the school principal having a vision and communicating it to the staff.

Research Design

The study was a non-experimental, quantitative study using secondary data from the 2020–2021 National Teacher and Principal Survey administered by the NCES (NCES, n.d.c). The purpose of this study was to identify specific actions taken by principals that may influence the intentions of full-time elementary teachers in public schools within their first 5 years of teaching to remain in the profession. The analysis used existing data from the National Teacher and Principal Survey, wherein individual teachers provided their responses based on their individual experiences and perceptions. A non-experimental, quantitative analysis was the most fitting approach because no intervention or treatment was involved and the analysis was based on

the respondents' self-reported data (Patten & Newhart, 2018).

Sample

The 2020–2021 NCES National Teacher and Principal Survey (NTPS) consisted of six discrete survey instruments, three for the public sector (Principal Questionnaire, School Questionnaire, and Teacher Questionnaire) and three for the private sector (Principal Questionnaire, School Questionnaire, and Teacher Questionnaire; NCES, n.d.d). The teacher surveys were administered beginning in November 2020, and data were collected until April 2021.

This study used data collected by the Teacher Questionnaire from public schools. The survey sampled approximately 68,300 public school teachers and yielded an overall response rate of 55%. The analysis used weighted sample sizes to enhance representativeness. Within the public school teacher survey responses, the study isolated data specific to respondents who were full-time, elementary school teachers in their first 5 years of teaching. As such the sample size was significantly smaller than the entire sample set.

Research Instrument and Measures

The survey was designed and administered by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). The NCES (n.d.d) is:

the primary statistical agency of the U.S. Department of Education. ... NCES is located within the U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences (IES). NCES has a Congressional mandate to collect, collate, analyze, and report complete statistics on the condition of American education; conduct and publish reports; and review and report on education activities internationally.

Data generated by NCES is publicly available.

Public schools were identified by several criteria, including providing instruction to students in one or more grades between 1-12, receiving public funds as their primary source of financial support, and being operated by an education agency (NCES, n.d.e). Public schools in all 50 states and the District of Columbia were included. The survey sample was designed to include a broad range of participants, including those from charter schools, different community types (e.g., rural, suburban, urban), school size, and poverty status. Teachers received communication about the survey through email as well as site-based survey coordinators and were given the opportunity to complete the survey electronically or on a paper version. Multiple rounds of follow-up by phone, email, and United States mail were provided to teachers who had not yet participated.

The United States Census Bureau administered the survey on behalf of NCES. The Census Bureau employed multiple measures to solicit a strong response rate. The initial communications to teachers, both via email and United States mail, as well as the survey itself included several items to instill confidence in the process and to incentivize participation, including the official United States of America Department of Education logo, a monetary (\$5) or non-monetary (tote bag) gift, individual log-in information, and assurance of anonymity. Perhaps most importantly, the communications included an appeal for teachers to participate as a means of influencing policymakers and promoting greater understanding and support for public education. The survey cover, the advance teacher invitation email, and the initial teacher invitation letter referenced the authorizing federal code for conducting the survey and also provided clear language about the use of the data:

All of the information you provide may be used only for statistical purposes and may not be disclosed, or used, in identifiable form for any other purpose except as required by law

(20 U.S.C. §9573 and 6 U.S.C. §151; NCES, n.d.c).

This research study used the 2020–2021 NCES survey data. NCES has developed a cycle of data collection for the NTPS, wherein two different modules are administered. Both modules contain a set of common questions, called the Core Modules. The Core Modules asked for general employment and background information, professional experience and preparation for teaching, class organization, education and training, and certification. After the Core Modules, there are two sets of questions, Set A and Set B. Only one set of questions is used for each survey administration, and the sets alternate. Each set of questions addresses different areas of focus and therefore, has different questions. The questions in the Set A module relate directly to the focus of this study; this set was last administered in 2020–2021. Prior to the 2020–2021 administration, the Set B module was administered in 2017-2018 and the Set A module was administered in 2015-2016. This alternating pattern is expected to continue in future years. See Figure 2 for the modules used in the National Teacher and Principal Surveys.

Figure 2

Modules in the National Teacher and Principal Survey Teacher Questionnaires

Teacher Questionnaires

Core Modules (every cycle)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General employment and background information (including base salary, salary supplements, and demographic characteristics) • Professional experience and preparation for teaching • Class organization • Education and training • Certification 	
Set A Modules (2015-16, 2020-21)	Set B Modules (2017-18)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early career experiences • Working conditions • School climate and teacher attitudes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher evaluation • Teacher professional development • Teacher engagement

Reliability and Validity

Reliability refers to the degree to which an instrument yields consistent results (Patten & Newhart, 2018). In quantitative research, validity informs whether meaningful and useful inferences can be drawn based on the data gathered (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). If an instrument is to be useful, it needs to be reasonably reliable as well as reasonably valid (Patten & Newhart, 2018).

The NCES website provides information about the methods and procedures used, including the questionnaire design, sampling frames, sample design, data collection, data editing, imputation, weighting, and response rates, as well as a technical report further detailing the validity and reliability of the survey and its findings (NCES, n.d.e). In order to ensure the reliability of results, attention was given to both potential nonsampling and sampling errors.

Regarding potential nonsampling errors, for example, “quality control and edit procedures were used to reduce errors made by respondents, coders, and interviewers” (Taie & Lewis, 2022, p. B-21). Additionally, data processing for the NTPS survey was conducted by the United States Census Bureau. Their work included coding each individual questionnaire by its response status and running quality control checks (e.g., consistency edits and blanking edits), which generated a list of potentially problematic surveys. These surveys were subject to further review to determine a response status.

Data Collection Procedures

The intent of the study was to utilize responses from full-time, licensed public elementary school teachers who are in their first 5 years of teaching. Data from the NCES survey is publicly available on the NCES website through DataLab, which is a web-based tool providing access to data generated from NCES studies (NCES, n.d.f). DataLab is interactive, providing codebooks as well as a number of analyses that it will allow the user to perform within the system, including percentage distribution, averages, medians, and percents, percentiles, linear regression, logistic regression, and correlation matrix.

The analysis utilized questions in the General Information portion of the survey in the Core Module to isolate the intended participants.

1. Full-time teachers: The survey asked respondents to identify their current role: How much time do you work as a teacher in any grades K–12 or comparable ungraded levels at this school? This study included participants who checked the “Full-time” response.
2. Teachers who are in their first 5 years of teaching: The survey asked respondents the following: Last school year (2019-2020), what was your main activity? The survey asked respondents to select one of 16 possible responses, including an open field for “Other.”

This study included the responses from those who selected any of the following five options: Teaching in this school; Teaching in another public elementary, middle, or secondary school in this school system; Teaching in a public elementary, middle, or secondary school in a different school system in this state; Teaching in a public elementary, middle, or secondary school in another state; or Teaching in a private elementary, middle, or secondary school. In doing so, this identified respondents who had at least 2 consecutive years of teaching experience in public schools.

The survey asked respondents for the total number of years worked: Excluding time spent on maternity/paternity leave or sabbatical, how many school years have you worked, either full-time or part-time, as a K–12 or comparable ungraded level teacher in public, public charter, or private schools? This study included responses from teachers who reported having 1, 2, 3, 4, or 5 years of teaching experience (95.88% of the original sample worked full-time and 20.5% of teachers in the original sample had 5 years of experience or less).

3. Elementary school teachers who teach in self-contained classrooms: The second portion of the survey was titled “Class Organization.” The first question in this portion asked respondents to identify the current grade they are teaching. Respondents were able to select multiple grades. This study included responses from participants who selected Kindergarten, 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, or 5th as their grade.

Another question in this portion of the survey asked respondents, “Which statement best describes the way your classes at this school are organized?” They were able to select just one option. The study examined one of the five possible options: You instruct the same group of students all or most of the day in multiple subjects. This

isolated the study to teachers who teach in a self-contained classroom (29.38% of the original sample).

Finally, this study used a question that asked respondents, “In what subject is your main teaching assignment at this school?” This study isolated only respondents who selected elementary grades, general (29.81% of the original sample).

4. Licensed teachers who completed a preparation program: The fourth portion of the survey was called Certification. Many states have alternative routes to teacher certification or licensure. The purpose of this study was to identify and isolate teachers who had successfully completed a traditional preparation program and licensure process prior to entering the classroom. This study utilized the question in this section that asked, “Did you enter teaching through an alternative route to certification program?” Only responses of No were included in this study (80.59% of the original sample).

Using these variables as the basis for the analysis, the study was able to identify and isolate data from full-time, licensed, public elementary school teachers who teach in a self-contained classroom and who are in their first 5 years of teaching.

Data Analysis

Five independent analyses were conducted using the NCES data through DataLab. Each analysis sought to answer the question of whether there is a difference between two categorical variables, which required using chi-square tests (Patten & Newhart, 2018). Specifically, two analyses investigated whether there was a difference in teachers’ intent to stay in the profession based on perceptions of their experiences with a principal during their first year of teaching, and the remaining three analyses investigated whether there was a difference in teachers’ intent to stay in the profession based on perceptions of their experiences with a principal during their

current year of teaching,

Independent Variables

Five survey items served as the independent variables:

1. Survey question 5-6e: Whether they received “Regular supportive communication with your principal, other administrators, or department chair” during their first year of teaching. Respondents answered Yes or No.
2. Survey question 5-6f: Whether they received “Observation and feedback on your teaching aimed at helping you develop and refine your teaching practice beyond any formal administrative observation and feedback you may have received” during their first year of teaching. Respondents answered Yes or No.
3. Survey question 7-7a: Whether they agree (somewhat or strongly) that “the school administration’s behavior toward the staff is supportive and encouraging.”
4. Survey question 7-7g: Whether they agree (somewhat or strongly) that “my principal enforces school rules for student conduct and backs me up when I need it.”
5. Survey question 7-7j: Whether they agree (somewhat or strongly) that “the principal knows what kind of school he or she wants and has communicated it to the staff.”

Dependent Variable

The dependent variable for each analysis was the teachers’ intent to remain in teaching. Specifically, the survey asked respondents: Which statement best describes how long you plan to remain in teaching? Eight responses were available and respondents were able to select just one response. A chi-square test determined whether there was a difference in each of these analyses. The study clustered the responses into three categories for the purpose of the analysis.

1. Category 1: These responses indicate general satisfaction; the teacher would likely

remain in the profession for the long term.

- As long as I am able
- Until I am eligible for retirement benefits from this job
- Until I am eligible for retirement benefits from a previous job
- Until I am eligible for Social Security benefits
- Until a specific life event occurs (e.g., parenthood, marriage, retirement of spouse or partner)

2. Category 2: These responses indicate dissatisfaction; the teacher would likely remain in the profession for the short term.

- Until a more desirable job opportunity comes along
- Definitely plan to leave as soon as I can

3. Category 3: Unknown.

- Undecided at this time

Limitations and Delimitations

The analysis in this study attempted to draw reasonable conclusions and make accurate inferences (Patten & Newhart, 2018). This study was a non-experimental analysis using secondary data. Because it relied on secondary data, no opportunity exists to talk directly with respondents. This represents an inherent limitation of the study, as there may be varied interpretations of language and quality of responses provided.

The NCES survey did not define terms for the respondents. The language of each of the independent variables could be subject to individual interpretation. Examples include the following:

1. What does “regular supportive communication” mean?

2. What constitutes “observation and feedback on your teaching aimed at helping you develop and refine your teaching practice”?
3. How do individual teachers perceive an administrator’s behavior to be “supportive and encouraging?”
4. Is there variability between teachers in terms of their view of appropriate student conduct and their threshold for needing support from their principal?
5. What constitutes a principal knowing and communicating “what kind of school he or she wants?”

As such, there is likely to be variability within the data based on how individual respondents interpreted these questions.

The response rate of 55% represents strong participation but may also represent a selection bias. Specifically, teachers were encouraged to participate as a means to influence public policy. Therefore it is possible that teachers who hold a more negative view and who believe public policy is lacking may have been more incentivized to participate in the survey.

The analysis provides valuable insights into the impact of specific actions taken by a principal on teachers’ intent to continue teaching. However, there are likely many other variables influencing teachers’ responses. For example, this study does not consider compensation, working conditions, student demographics, or other possible factors that might influence teachers’ plans to continue in the profession. Because of these realities, it is difficult to make a claim of clear causality. In keeping with the NCES data collection, the scope of this study is limited to American schools. Teacher shortages may exist outside of the United States, but because the survey was administered only to American teachers, the resulting analysis is limited to American teachers.

An additional and significant limitation of this study is that the survey was administered during the 2020–2021 school year, shortly after the spring of 2020 when typical instructional delivery methods were disrupted due to the COVID-19 pandemic and most American schools shifted to distance learning. By the following fall, there were a variety of delivery models; some schools delivered instruction in distance-learning or hybrid models. Others offered in-person learning, and often in those cases there were layers of new safety protocols put in place including masking, quarantines, cleaning regimens, and social distancing. As such, it was not a typical year for the majority of teachers, and that context may have impacted teachers' responses.

The full NCES data set includes teachers at several levels, including preschool, elementary school, middle school, and high school, but this analysis limited the data to elementary school teachers. Because of vast differences in each level and the role of the principal within each level, including teachers at other levels could introduce a number of complexities in the analysis. Specifically, preschool teachers were not included in recognition of the fact that most states consider preschool outside the scope of an elementary teaching license. In most states, preparation programs for elementary education include kindergarten through fifth grade (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2023a). Further, it is commonly accepted that preschool education is separate and uniquely different from K–12 education. Education governance structures and the policies, funding, and infrastructures that follow are typically divided into three broad categories: early childhood through pre-kindergarten, K–12, and postsecondary (Fischer et al., 2020).

This study also did not include secondary (middle school and upper school) teachers. The primary difference between elementary and secondary teachers is that elementary teachers are typically generalists, teaching all subjects to the same students each day, while secondary teachers specialize in a specific content area, teaching different students throughout the day. As

such, the roles and necessary support are uniquely different.

The data set being used in this study was data collected from public school teachers. The same survey was administered to private school teachers in America. Significant differences exist between public and private schools, including governance, funding, accountability measures, standards, and curriculum (Small & Buckman, 2021). Only data from public schools was used, and as a result, this study's findings will have limited transferability to the private school context.

Finally, the study was limited to teachers in their first 5 years of teaching. Limiting the data in this way assumes that teachers are able to recall their early experiences more clearly, thereby increasing confidence in any conclusions drawn about teachers' early experiences.

Ethical Considerations

Following the exposure of concerning acts committed in the name of research in the early 1970s, a group was commissioned by the United States federal government to determine standards for ethical practices within research involving human subjects. The Belmont Report was the resulting, seminal work, published in 1979 (Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, 1979). The Belmont Report provided a framework of three basic ethical principles: respect for persons, beneficence, and justice. Researchers apply these principles in three practical domains within research: informed consent, assessment of risk and benefits, and selection of subjects.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services later codified these principles into federal regulation, providing the standards for research practices (Protection of Human Subjects, 2005). Also known as the Common Rule, the federal regulation defined research as a "systematic investigation, including development, testing, and evaluation, designed to develop or contribute

to generalizable knowledge” (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, n.d.).

Data from the NCES National Teacher and Principal Survey comports with both the spirit and the letter of the Belmont Report and the federal regulations. Participation in the survey was voluntary, the federal authorizing act was named, and the survey provided assurance that all information provided by respondents would be used solely for research and statistical purposes and would not be in an identifiable form (NCES, n.d.d). As such, there is no indication of coercion, and respondents were provided a commitment to anonymity.

The researcher successfully completed coursework regarding the Belmont Report, federal regulations, and ethical research practices as well as the requirements to receive a certificate of completion from the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI; see Appendix A.) The researcher also met all of the requirements set forth by the Bethel University Institutional Review Board (IRB) to proceed with the study. IRB approval was granted on February 7, 2024. (See Appendix B).

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore how school principals can leverage their role to strengthen teachers' retention, and in particular, how they might interrupt the trend of teachers leaving the profession within the first 5 years. Chapter 4 provides the results of the analysis, beginning with the descriptive statistics to provide overall information about the sample used for the study. The descriptive statistics section includes several tables containing demographic information about the sample. It also provides the responses to each of the five research questions, broken into two categories: reflecting on teachers' first year of teaching and reflecting on teachers' current year of teaching. The final descriptive statistic provided is the summary of teachers' intentions to remain in teaching.

Following the descriptive statistics, the results of the analysis for each of the five research questions are presented individually, including the statistical significance of the chi-square test that was conducted for each question and critical initial analysis relating to each question. Finally, a summary of the findings is presented as well as a table providing an overview of the hypotheses and the final results for each.

Descriptive Statistics

The study used data from the public school Teacher Questionnaire from the 2020–2021 NCES National Teacher and Principal Survey (NTPS); this was the most recent version of the survey containing the questions relating to principal behaviors. The survey sampled approximately 68,300 public school teachers and yielded an overall response rate of 55%. The analysis used weighted sample sizes to enhance representativeness. The sample sizes were different among survey items due to survey attrition.

Tables 1-6 provide descriptive statistics for the sample in this study. Table 1 shows the breakdown of male and female respondents. In the original sample, the breakdown of males and females was roughly one-quarter male (23.2%) and roughly three-quarters female (76.8%; Taie & Lewis, 2022). However, in the sample used for this study, the large majority of respondents were female (93.25%) and only 6.75% were male. Because the study sample included teachers with 5 or fewer years of teaching experience, this suggests that fewer males had entered the teaching profession in the 5 years preceding the survey.

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics for Sample: Gender

	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
Male	9,174	6.75
Female	126,834	93.25

Table 2 shows the racial and ethnic breakdown of respondents. The sample used for this study closely mirrored the original sample (Taie & Lewis, 2022). Specifically, in both groups, nearly 80% of the respondents were White (79.9% in the original sample; 78.4% in the study sample). The next largest ethnicity in both groups was Hispanic (9.4% in the original sample; 10.43% in the study sample), followed by Black (6.1% in the original sample; 5.16% in the study sample), Asian (2.4% in the original sample; 3.37% in the study sample), and Multiracial (1.6% in the original sample; 2.21% in the study sample). In both groups, less than 1% of respondents were American Indian (0.4% in the original sample; 0.29% in the study sample) or Hawaiian Native (0.2% in the original sample; 0.14% in the study sample).

Table 2

Demographic Characteristics for Sample: Race / Ethnicity

	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
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White	106,632	78.40
Hispanic	14,159	10.43
Black	7,019	5.16
Asian	4,582	3.37
Multiracial	3,004	2.21
American Indian	397	0.29
Hawaiian Native	185	0.14

A Bachelor's degree was the highest degree earned for approximately two-thirds of the respondents used in this study, and approximately one-third had earned a Master's degree (see Table 3). Given that the study isolated teachers who had 5 or fewer years of teaching experience, it is not surprising that the original sample showed nearly a reverse of this data, with roughly one-third having earned a Bachelor's degree (38.2%) and almost two-thirds having earned a Master's degree or Doctorate or Professional degree (61%; Taie & Lewis, 2022).

Table 3

Demographic Characteristics for Sample: Highest Degree Earned

	<i>n</i>	%
Associate's Degree / No College	317	0.23
Bachelor's Degree	90,473	66.52
Master's Degree	42,900	31.54
Education Specialist / Certificate of Advanced Graduate Studies	2,131	1.57
Doctorate / Professional Degree	‡	‡

Table 4 shows that the large majority of respondents taught in a non-charter public school (91.67%); only 8.33% of respondents taught in a public charter school.

Table 4

Demographic Characteristics for Sample: Public School Type

	<i>n</i>	%
Public Charter School	11,325	8.33
Public Non-Charter School	124,683	91.67

Of the four regions within the sample, roughly one-third of the sample was from the South region (33.70%). Both the Midwest region and the West region accounted for approximately one-quarter of the respondents (27.16% and 24.70% respectively), while only 14.44% of the sample was from the Northeast region. Table 5 shows the distribution of respondents across the four census regions determined by the American National Standards Institute.

Table 5

Demographic Characteristics for Sample: Census Region

	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
South	45,838	33.70
Midwest	36,935	27.16
West	33,589	24.70
Northeast	19,646	14.44

Finally, Table 6 shows that approximately two-thirds of the respondents used in the study were ages 29 or younger (67.60%), and as the age of the teachers increased, the percentage of teachers in the age group decreased. This is not surprising, as the study isolated early career teachers, those with 5 or fewer years of teaching experience. In contrast, within the original sample just 14.2% of respondents were ages 29 or younger (Taie & Lewis, 2022). Similarly, whereas teachers between the ages of 30 and 49 represented less than one-third of the study's sample, this was the largest group within the original sample, with over half of the respondents in this group (55.5%). Finally, as expected, there were many more teachers ages 50 and older in the original sample, with 30.3%, this group accounted for roughly one-third of the sample. In contrast, just 3.34% of teachers included in the study were age 50 or older.

Table 6

Demographic Characteristics for Sample: Age

	<i>n</i>	%
29 or younger	91,943	67.60
30 to 39	26,952	19.82
40 to 49	12,579	9.25
50 to 59	3,802	2.80
60 or older	731	0.54

Given all of these descriptive statistics, the majority of respondents were White females, age 29 or younger, who held a Bachelor's degree and who were teaching in non-charter public schools.

The next two tables provide descriptive information about the respondents' perceptions of their experiences. Table 7 provides the responses of full-time public elementary school teachers for the two research questions that asked them to reflect on their first year of teaching. Respondents included teachers within their first 5 years of teaching; therefore, all respondents may be considered early career teachers. Table 7 shows that nearly three-quarters of early career teachers believed that they received supportive communication and feedback during their first year of teaching. In contrast, over one-quarter of early career teachers believed that they did not receive supportive communication and feedback during their first year of teaching. The yes and no responses were nearly identical for both of these questions.

Table 7

Teacher Perceptions of Support Received During First Year of Teaching

	Yes		No	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Received regular, supportive communication	85,983	73.05	31,720	26.95
Received feedback on teaching to help develop and refine teaching practice beyond formal administrative feedback	86,564	73.55	31,139	26.45

Table 8 provides the responses of full-time public elementary school teachers when asked to reflect on their current teaching position. Respondents included teachers within their first 5 years of teaching; as such, all respondents may be considered early career teachers. Table 8 shows that a majority of teachers had a favorable perception in each of these areas: school administration's behavior toward the staff is supportive and encouraging, the principal enforces school rules and backs teachers up when needed, and the principal knows what kind of school he or she wants and has communicated it to the staff. In each of these three areas, the combined favorable responses (somewhat agree or agree) were between 84.72% and 86.99%. The combined negative responses (strongly disagree or somewhat disagree) were between 13.21% and 15.28%.

Table 8

Teacher Perceptions of Support Received During Current Year of Teaching

	Strongly Disagree		Somewhat Disagree		Somewhat Agree		Agree	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Administration is supportive and encouraging	5,832	4.29	11,871	8.73	46,349	34.08	71,956	52.91
Principal enforces school rules and backs teachers up	3,977	2.92	13,990	10.29	51,473	37.85	66,568	48.94
Principal communicates vision for the school	4,890	3.59	15,895	11.69	47,847	35.18	67,377	49.54

Finally, Table 9 provides the responses of licensed, full-time public elementary school teachers when asked which of eight statements best described how long they planned to remain in teaching. Respondents included teachers within their first 5 years of teaching; thus, all

respondents may be considered early career teachers.

Table 9

Teachers' Intentions to Remain in Teaching

	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
As long as I'm able	60,815	44.71
Until I am eligible for retirement benefits from this job	28,092	20.65
Until I am eligible for retirement benefits from a previous job	‡	‡
Until I am eligible for Social Security benefits	525	0.39
Until a specific life event occurs (e.g., parenthood, marriage, retirement of spouse or partner)	10,709	7.87
Until a more desirable job opportunity comes along	11,611	8.54
Definitely plan to leave as soon as I can	3,040	2.23
Undecided at this time	21,085	15.50

Table 9 shows that 10.77% of teachers planned to leave teaching prior to retirement or a specific life event, and 15.50% of teachers were undecided. A majority of teachers (73.62%) indicated that they planned to remain in teaching until retirement (e.g., eligibility for retirement benefits or Social Security benefits) or a specific life event (parenthood, marriage, retirement of spouse or partner). One of the options did not yield sufficient responses to include in the data: Until I am eligible for retirement benefits from a previous job.

For the purposes of the analysis, the eight responses were clustered into three categories. The first category was called “long-term,” indicating general satisfaction, and included five of

the possible responses: As long as I am able, Until I am eligible for retirement benefits from this job, Until I am eligible for retirement benefits from a previous job, Until I am eligible for Social Security benefits, and Until a specific life event occurs (e.g., parenthood, marriage, retirement of spouse or partner). The second category was called “short-term,” indicating dissatisfaction and included two of the possible responses: Until a more desirable job opportunity comes along and Definitely plan to leave as soon as I can. The final category was called “unknown” and included the remaining response: Undecided at this time.

Results

Results for Research Question One

The first research question was “Is there a statistically significant ($p < .05$) difference in elementary teachers’ intent to remain in the teaching profession based on their perceptions of having received supportive communication from principals or other administrators during the first year of teaching?” A chi-square test of independence was conducted, and the results of the chi-square model between these variables were statistically significant ($\chi^2[2] = 1512.61, p < .001$, Table 10).

Table 10

Intentions to Remain in Teaching Based on Supportive Principal Communication During the First Year of Teaching

	Unknown		Short-Term		Long-Term	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Yes	11,707	13.62	9,206	10.71	65,071	75.68
No	7,293	22.99	3,197	10.08	21,230	66.93

The results suggest that approximately 10% of the teachers planned to remain in teaching for the short term, regardless of whether they believed that they received supportive

communication from their principal during their first year of teaching. The combined total for teachers indicating long-term intentions and unknown intentions was approximately 89% for both groups of teachers (those who believed they had received supportive communication and those who believed they had not received supportive communication). However, there was a roughly 10% difference between the long-term and unknown responses between the two groups. Specifically, 75.68% of teachers who believed they had received supportive communication were in the long-term category, as compared to 66.93% who did not believe they received supportive communication. Similarly, 13.62% of teachers who had received supportive communication were in the unknown category, as compared to 22.99% of teachers who had not received supportive communication.

Results for Research Question Two

The second research question was “Is there a statistically significant ($p < .05$) difference in elementary teachers’ intent to remain in the teaching profession based on their perceptions of having received meaningful feedback beyond formal evaluations during the first year of teaching?” A chi-square test of independence was conducted, and the results of the chi-square model between these variables were statistically significant ($\chi^2[2] = 321.41, p < .001$, Table 11).

Table 11

Intentions to Remain in Teaching Based on Having Received Meaningful Feedback During the First Year of Teaching

	Unknown		Short-Term		Long-Term	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Yes	13,140	15.18	8,553	9.88	64,871	74.94
No	5,860	18.82	3,197	12.36	21,230	68.82

The results for Question Two follow a similar pattern, wherein a majority in both groups

of teachers (those who believed that they had received meaningful feedback during their first year of teaching and those who did not) indicated that they planned to remain in teaching for the long-term, 74.94% and 68.82% respectively. However, compared to the results from Question One, the number of teachers falling into the short-term category was lower for teachers who had received meaningful feedback (9.88%) and higher for those who had not (12.36%), suggesting that this variable was more important to teachers when considering their career plans than having received supportive communication during their first year of teaching.

Results for Research Question Three

The remaining three research questions asked teachers to reflect on their current teaching position. The third research question was “Is there a statistically significant ($p < .05$) difference in elementary teachers’ intent to remain in the teaching profession based on their perceptions of their school administrators’ behavior as supportive and encouraging?” Respondents selected a level of agreement from four options: strongly agree, somewhat agree, strongly disagree, and somewhat disagree. The analysis clustered the options into two broader categories indicating agreement or disagreement. A chi-square test of independence was conducted, and the results of the chi-square model between these variables were statistically significant ($\chi^2[2] = 321.41, p < .001$, Table 12).

Table 12

Intentions to Remain in Teaching Based on whether the Administrator’s Behavior toward Staff is

Supportive and Encouraging

	Unknown		Short-Term		Long-Term	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Somewhat or strongly agree	18,135	15.39	11,144	9.42	89,025	75.25
Somewhat or strongly disagree	2,950	16.66	3,506	19.81	11,247	63.53

The results suggest that teachers' perceptions of school administrators' behavior toward staff was an important factor in their intentions to remain in teaching. Teachers who agreed that their administration was supportive and encouraging were 11.72% more likely to indicate long-term intentions than those who disagreed (75.25% and 63.53% respectively). Conversely, teachers who disagreed were also 10.39% more likely to indicate short-term intentions (19.81% and 9.42% respectively). The results were closer for those indicating unknown intentions, although there were more teachers in this category who disagreed than those who agreed (16.66% and 15.39% respectively).

Results for Research Question Four

The fourth research question was "Is there a statistically significant ($p < .05$) difference in elementary teachers' intent to remain in the teaching profession based on their perceptions of their school principals enforcing school rules and supporting teachers?" Respondents selected a level of agreement from four options: strongly agree, somewhat agree, strongly disagree, and somewhat disagree. The analysis clustered the options into two broader categories indicating agreement or disagreement. A chi-square test of independence was conducted, and the results of the chi-square model between these variables were statistically significant ($\chi^2[2] = 1453.92, p < .001$, Table 13).

Table 13

Intentions to Remain in Teaching Based on whether the Principal Enforces Rules for Student Conduct and Backs the Teacher up when Needed

	Unknown		Short-Term		Long-Term	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Somewhat or strongly agree	18,698	15.84	11,420	9.67	87,923	74.49
Somewhat or strongly disagree	2,387	13.29	3,231	17.98	12,349	68.73

The results from this analysis showed smaller differences between teachers indicating agreement and disagreement than the prior question. The difference between teachers expressing agreement was 5.76% within the long-term group (74.49% as compared to 68.73%) and just 2.55% within the unknown group (15.84% as compared to 13.29%). Relative to the previous analyses, these differences were smaller. The largest difference was in the short-term group, wherein the difference between teachers expressing disagreement and agreement was 8.31% (17.98% as compared to 9.67%).

Results for Research Question Five

The fifth and final research question was “Is there a statistically significant ($p < .05$) difference in elementary teachers’ intent to remain in the teaching profession based on their perceptions of their school principals’ having a vision and communicating it to the staff?” Respondents selected a level of agreement from four options: strongly agree, somewhat agree, strongly disagree, and somewhat disagree. The analysis clustered the options into two broader categories indicating agreement or disagreement. A chi-square test of independence was conducted, and the results of the chi-square model between these variables were statistically significant ($\chi^2[2] = 1060.97, p < .001$, Table 14).

Table 14

Intentions to Remain in Teaching Based on whether the Principal Knows what Kind of School He or She Wants and has Communicated it to the Staff

	Unknown		Short-Term		Long-Term	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Somewhat or strongly agree	16,437	14.27	12,048	10.46	86,738	75.28
Somewhat or strongly disagree	4,648	22.36	2,602	12.52	13,534	65.18

The results suggest that this variable is not as important as other variables for teachers

who have short-term intentions about remaining in the profession; the difference between teachers who expressed disagreement and agreement was just 2.06%. The difference for teachers in the unknown group was 8.09% (22.36% for teachers who expressed disagreement as compared to 14.27% for teachers who expressed agreement). The difference for teachers in the long-term group was the largest, with a 10.1% difference (75.28% for teachers who expressed agreement compared to 65.18% for teachers who expressed disagreement).

Summary

In conclusion, the data show that teachers' perceptions of actions taken, or not taken, by their school principals influence their intentions to remain in teaching. Having administrators whose behaviors were perceived to be supportive and encouraging to the staff yielded the largest difference in teachers' long-term and short-term intentions.

In each of the five analyses, of the teachers who responded positively, roughly 75% expressed long-term intentions; the range was from 74.49% to 75.68%. None of the variables yielded a substantially higher or lower response for these teachers. However, two of the variables yielded larger numbers of teachers with short-term intentions. Specifically, 19.81% of the teachers who responded negatively to the question about administrators' behavior toward staff (Question Three) expressed short-term intentions and 17.98% of the teachers who responded negatively to the question about their principal enforcing school rules and backing the teacher up (Question Four) expressed short-term intentions. While some variables appear to have a greater impact, it is clear from the data that the actions of school principals impact teachers' intentions to remain in teaching.

Table 15

Overview of Results: Null and Alternative Hypothesis Results

Research Question	Null	Reject or fail to	Alternative	Reject or fail to
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	Hypothesis	reject null hypothesis	Hypothesis	reject alternative hypothesis
RQ1: Is there a statistically significant ($p < .05$) difference in elementary teachers' intent to remain in the teaching profession based on their perceptions of having received supportive communication from principals or other administrators during the first year of teaching?	Ho1: There is no difference in elementary teachers' intent to remain in the teaching profession based on their perceptions of having received supportive communication from principals or other administrators during the first year of teaching.	Reject	Ha1: There is a difference in elementary teachers' intent to remain in the teaching profession based on their perceptions of having received supportive communication from principals or other administrators during the first year of teaching.	Fail to reject
RQ2: Is there a statistically significant ($p < .05$) difference in elementary teachers' intent to remain in the teaching profession based on their perceptions of having received meaningful feedback beyond formal evaluations during the first year of teaching?	Ho2: There is no difference in elementary teachers' intent to remain in the teaching profession based on their perceptions of having received meaningful feedback beyond formal evaluations during the first year of teaching.	Reject	Ha2: There is a difference in elementary teachers' intent to remain in the teaching profession based on their perceptions of having received meaningful feedback beyond formal evaluations during the first year of teaching.	Fail to reject
RQ3: Is there a statistically significant ($p < .05$) difference in elementary teachers' intent to remain in the teaching profession based on their perceptions of their school administrators' behavior as supportive and encouraging?	Ho3: There is no difference in elementary teachers' intent to remain in the teaching profession based on their perceptions of school administrators' behavior as supportive and	Reject	Ha3: There is a difference in elementary teachers' intent to remain in the teaching profession based on their perceptions of school administrators'	Fail to reject

	encouraging.		behavior as supportive and encouraging.	
RQ4: Is there a statistically significant ($p < .05$) difference in elementary teachers' intent to remain in the teaching profession based on their perceptions of their school principals enforcing school rules and supporting teachers?	Ho4: There is no difference in elementary teachers' intent to remain in the teaching profession based on their perceptions of the school principal enforcing school rules for student conduct and supporting the teacher.	Reject	Ha4: There is a difference in elementary teachers' intent to remain in the teaching profession based on their perceptions of the school principal enforcing school rules for student conduct and supporting the teacher.	Fail to reject
RQ5: Is there a statistically significant ($p < .05$) difference in elementary teachers' intent to remain in the teaching profession based on their perceptions of their school principals' having a vision and communicating it to the staff?	Ho5: There is no difference in elementary teachers' intent to remain in the teaching profession based on their perceptions of the school principal having a vision and communicating it to the staff.	Reject	Ha5: There is a difference in elementary teachers' intent to remain in the teaching profession based on their perceptions of the school principal having a vision and communicating it to the staff.	Fail to reject

Chapter 5: Discussion, Implications, and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to analyze the impact of specific actions taken by school principals, as perceived by teachers, to see how they might interrupt the trend of teachers leaving the profession within the first 5 years. Toward this end, this quantitative study identified five questions from the 2020–2021 National Teacher and Principal Survey wherein teachers reflected on actions by their school principal, and chi-square tests were conducted, analyzing the relationship between teachers' reflections and their intentions to remain in teaching. The chi-square test of independence for all five questions was statistically significant. As such, the findings from this research provide valuable new insights into the existing body of research relating to teacher retention. This chapter discusses the specific findings within the data, followed by the implications for both practice and theory, as well as recommendations for future research relating to this important topic.

Discussion

The teacher shortage in America is both well-documented and longstanding. *A Nation at Risk*, published in 1983, was one of the earliest reports sounding the alarm on this issue (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). The early concerns related to a small number of disciplines including mathematics and science, but since then teacher shortages have been documented across numerous other licensure fields, including elementary teaching positions, which had historically been an area of teacher surplus (Sutcher et al., 2019). Although the specific manifestations of teacher shortages may vary between states or regions, teacher shortages have become a significant and consistent policy issue in nearly every state in the country in some form (Sutcher et al., 2016).

The shortages are consistently more pronounced in schools that serve non-White, low-income, and low-performing student populations, students with disabilities, and students who are English language learners (Behrstock-Sherratt, 2016; Espinoza et al., 2018; Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018; Player et al., 2017; Podolsky et al., 2016; Redding & Henry, 2018; Ronfeldt et al., 2013; Vagi et al., 2019). Teacher shortages negatively impact students' academic performance (Greenberg et al., 2016; Lee, 2018; Ronfeldt et al., 2013; Vagi et al., 2019) and are costly to school districts that must replace teachers at an alarming rate (Garcia et al., 2022; Vagi et al., 2019). Since 2011, the attrition rate for teachers in their first 5 years has stabilized at roughly 40% (Wang, 2021; Williams et al., 2022).

The results of this study provide a different and more encouraging view of the persistence of early career teachers. Table 9 shows the distribution of teachers' responses to the survey question about their intentions to remain in teaching. Specifically, teachers were asked to select which of eight statements best described their plans. For the purposes of this analysis, the eight responses were clustered into three categories: "long-term," indicating general satisfaction; "short-term," indicating dissatisfaction; and "unknown." Nearly three-quarters of respondents (73.62%) fell into the long-term cluster, and only 10.77% fell into the short-term cluster. The remaining 15.50% were unknown. Whereas prior research has consistently shown an attrition rate of approximately 40% (Wang, 2021; Williams et al., 2022), this research paints a more optimistic view of early career teachers' intentions.

The purpose of this study was to explore how school principals might best utilize their role to strengthen teachers' retention, and in particular, how they might interrupt the trend of teachers leaving the profession within the first 5 years. The data from this study confirms the significant role that school principals play in strengthening teacher retention and provides insight

into what matters most to teachers as they consider their longevity in teaching. In each of the five research questions, roughly 75% of teachers who responded favorably about the actions of the school principal also fell into one of the categories indicating long-term intentions.

However, long-term intentions were negatively impacted when teachers reported unfavorably about the actions of the principal. In other words, the absence of these principals' actions resulted in a decline in long-term intentions. Across all five of the research questions, long-term intentions dropped for teachers who responded negatively about the principal's actions; the smallest decline was by 5.76% and the largest decline was by 11.72%. The long-term intentions for these teachers ranged from 63.53% to 68.82%; these results were closer to the 40% attrition rate seen in prior research (Wang, 2021; Williams et al., 2022).

It is clear from this data that when teachers' perceptions of principals' actions are unfavorable, there is a negative impact on their long-term plans to remain in the profession. Two of the research questions yielded a difference of more than 10% between teachers with favorable and unfavorable perceptions of their current school administrator: Research Question #3, which asked whether school administrators' behavior was supportive and encouraging (11.72%), and Research Question #5, which asked about school principals' having a vision and communicating it to the staff (10.1%). Together, these findings indicate actions that are of particular importance to teachers, and a perceived absence of those actions diminishes teachers' long-term intentions and likelihood to persist in teaching.

The data also provides critical insight into teachers who reported having short-term intentions. In each of the five research questions, roughly 10% of respondents who reported favorably about the principal's actions fell into the short-term cluster (9.42%–10.71%). This aligns with the data provided in the descriptive statistics (Table 9), where 10.77% of teachers

reported short-term intentions. Given this data, it appears that there is a small but persistent cohort within all early career teachers who do not intend to remain in teaching, regardless of whether their principals engage in specific actions.

For teachers who reported unfavorably about their principals' actions, the percentage of teachers indicating short-term intentions was generally greater, ranging from 10.08% to 19.81% across all five questions. Two of the questions in particular yielded much larger short-term responses, indicating that unfavorable perceptions in these areas exacerbate teachers' desire to leave teaching. Research Question #4 asked respondents about their perceptions of their school principals enforcing school rules and supporting teachers. Teachers who responded unfavorably to this question (17.98%) fell into the short-term cluster, suggesting that this is a particularly important issue to teachers, and when they perceive an absence of this kind of support they are more likely to want to leave the teaching profession.

The results for Research Question #3 were even more significant in terms of the impact on short-term intentions than Research Question #4. This question asked teachers about their perceptions of their school administrators' behavior as supportive and encouraging. Nearly 20% of teachers who responded unfavorably to this question (19.81%) indicated short-term intentions. Given that there appears to be a stable 10% of teachers in this study who desire to leave teaching regardless of their experiences, this response rate was nearly double and points to another area that is critically important to teachers.

The final category of teachers' responses was called Unknown. Within this category, there was a relatively small range across all five of the research questions of teachers who responded favorably about their principals' actions, from 13.62% to 15.84%. In contrast, there was a much larger range across the questions when looking at the teachers who responded

unfavorably, from 13.29% to 22.99%. Research Question #2 asked whether the teacher had received meaningful feedback beyond formal evaluations during the first year of teaching and for teachers who responded unfavorably, the Unknown responses were close to 20% (18.82%). For two of the research questions, the Unknown responses were greater than 20%. Research Question #1 asked whether the teacher had received supportive communication from principals or other administrators during the first year of teaching; the Unknown responses were 22.99%. Research Question #5 yielded similar Unknown responses, 22.36%, when teachers were asked about their perceptions of their school principals' having a vision and communicating it to the staff.

Of the three questions that had significantly higher rates of Unknown responses, two of them asked teachers to reflect on their first year of teaching (Research Question #1 and Research Question #2). Teachers' responses suggest that when they perceive a lack of support in these areas during their first year of teaching, it creates uncertainty in their confidence and in their intentions to remain in teaching. Two questions focused on the first year of teaching and the data were very similar for each of these two questions. The response rates were closely mirrored in nearly every part of the analysis, particularly within the responses of teachers with favorable perceptions of their principals. The largest difference was among teachers who had unfavorable perceptions; 4.17% more of those teachers were in the Unknown category for Research Question #1 (regarding supportive communication) than for Research Question #2 (regarding meaningful feedback). Over half of this difference (2.28%) was accounted for in the short-term responses, indicating that perceptions of not receiving meaningful feedback may have had a slightly stronger impact.

These results demonstrate that school principals play a critical role in retaining teachers

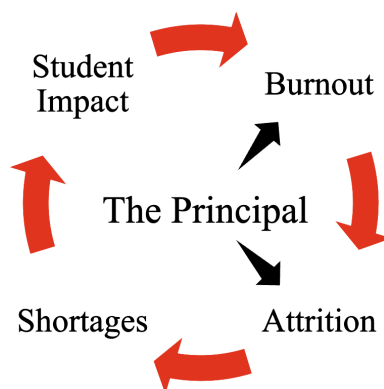
and that there are indeed specific actions that school principals can take to strengthen teachers' intentions to remain in teaching. Conversely, the absence of certain actions on the part of school principals results in greater numbers of teachers who plan to leave teaching and also greater numbers of teachers who are uncertain about whether they will persist in teaching.

Implications for Practice

The heart of this study was about gaining understanding of how to better utilize school principals in service of teacher retention. More specifically, the goal was to inform the understanding of the role of principals as a critical variable within teacher retention efforts. Introduced in Chapter 1, Figure 1 sought to illustrate the central role of principals and how they might be positioned to interrupt the vicious cycle of teacher burnout and attrition, which in turn leads to shortages, followed by negative spillover effects on students.

Figure 1

Interrupting the Current Cycle



As demonstrated by Figure 1, there are direct human impacts on burnout, attrition, and shortages, both for students and for teachers. There are also significant systemic impacts, including the tremendous financial burden borne by school districts. The estimated annual cost of teacher attrition in the United States ranges from \$7.3 to \$8.5 billion (Greenberg et al., 2016; Podolsky et al., 2016; Wronowski, 2018). Schools would save valuable dollars that are currently

being spent addressing the teacher shortage needs, including recruiting, hiring, mentoring, onboarding, and developing new teachers (Garcia et al., 2022; Vagi et al., 2019). These dollars would become available to invest directly into supporting students and their needs.

All of the processes involved in addressing the teacher shortage issue consume significant amounts of time for principals. Increasing teacher retention would also release precious time for principals that could be spent focusing on supporting teachers, which would only further strengthen teacher retention. The benefits could compound, and ultimately students will be the beneficiaries. Existing researchers have demonstrated that students' learning is positively correlated with having experienced teachers (Kini & Podolsky, 2016; Reichardt et al., 2020; Wronowski, 2018).

Given all of these realities, the stakes are high to interrupt this cycle. If principals are successful in supporting teachers in meaningful ways, teacher burnout will be less likely, and in turn, the remaining parts of the cycle will also be reduced. As such, the findings from this study are critically important and have substantial implications for practice in three distinct and important directions: 1) the daily work and focus of principals, 2) the preparation and training for new principals, and 3) policies and standards governing the role of school principals. Some of the recommendations presented within these three areas will require coordinated efforts across state and federal education agencies and higher education and will therefore take time to implement. However, many of the recommendations presented are immediately actionable. The fact remains that the research from this study is compelling, and if these implications are understood and the recommendations implemented, regardless of the ease and immediacy of the implementation, the collective impact could be tremendous.

Daily Work and Focus for School Principals

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, school principals are responsible for oversight of a school's operations, including daily operations. In addition to this broad definition, the Bureau of Labor Statistics provides a long list of the wide-ranging facets of oversight and management, including staff and performance evaluations, schedules, curriculum standards, student discipline, budgets, security, and student achievement data (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2023b). The role of school principals is extensive, and the results of this study should help principals focus on the most important facets of their role, prioritizing the types of actions that will yield the most important impact on teachers.

If, as this study suggests, principals can indeed strengthen the long-term intentions and increase the retention of early career teachers, then it follows that principals should prioritize their relationships and work with teachers over other areas of responsibility. This investment in teachers, particularly early career teachers, will reap multiple benefits. As previously demonstrated, retaining teachers will result in financial savings as a result of reduced attrition and subsequent hiring (Greenberg et al., 2016; Podolsky et al., 2016; Wronowski, 2018). Most importantly, retaining teachers will positively impact students.

Arguably all of the discrete responsibilities that fall within principals' purview are intended to promote student learning and growth. By extension, retaining teachers who can deliver stronger student achievement results should be a clear priority. Teachers grow significantly in their practice within their early years, and that experience and growth translate positively for students into increased academic achievement (Kini & Podolsky, 2016; Reichardt et al., 2020; Wronowski, 2018). It is important for principals to clearly understand this reality, and as a result, supporting early career teachers should be a focus and priority within their time,

attention, and efforts.

Beyond the academic benefits, there are ancillary benefits from having experienced teachers. One of the documented benefits is stronger student attendance (Kini & Podolsky, 2016; Lee, 2018). Not only do students with stronger attendance have stronger performance on national reading and math assessments (U.S. Department of Education, 2023), but more stable attendance also positively impacts the experience of teachers. Instability in student attendance creates compounding challenges for teachers, as it negatively impacts their planning and delivery of instruction and their ability to effectively and efficiently monitor and assess student growth. It also requires additional time to communicate with students and families about missed work or assessments.

Students also benefit from increased teacher retention when principals are not forced to fill vacancies with teachers who are unqualified, or worse yet, forced to leave vacancies unfilled (Beymer et al., 2023; Garcia & Weiss, 2019; McHenry-Sorber & Campbell, 2019; Nguyen et al., 2022). Teachers who lack preparation and credentialing are typically not able to support student needs and academic growth as effectively as those with professional training and licensure (Hanks et al., 2020). Along with the negative impacts on students' educational experiences and their overall academic achievement, another subtle, yet significant, implication is the impact on principals' time and focus. Even as new teachers, individuals entering the classroom having completed a licensure program bring a baseline of experience and understanding, through both coursework and school-based clinicals.

In contrast, individuals without this baseline may require substantial training and orientation beyond what is typically provided for first-year teachers, and principals may not be able to make the same assumptions about these individuals and their readiness to teach. For

example, they may not have even a basic understanding of assessment or differentiating strategies, or they may not be familiar with special education services and how to initiate an evaluation when concerns arise, or they may not have started developing their classroom management skills. All of these things represent additional challenges in how principals must onboard and support these individuals.

Each of these benefits should serve as strong incentives for principals to focus on retaining teachers, and this study's findings provide clear direction as to how they can do so. Teachers' intentions to remain in the profession are impacted by simple actions that principals can take. Several of the findings point to the importance of communication between principals and teachers. Specifically within the first year of teaching, teachers value receiving supportive communication and meaningful feedback outside of their formal evaluation system. These insights should inform how principals engage with first-year teachers.

New teachers are filled with a sense of purpose and a desire to grow (Fray & Gore, 2018; Kotowski et al., 2022), and principals have an incredible opportunity to capitalize on these realities in powerful ways through support, encouragement, and meaningful feedback. Principals have a unique opportunity to pour into the development of new teachers. From classroom set-up to lesson design, instructional strategies, assessment practices, student engagement and classroom management techniques, there are countless opportunities to foster their emerging skills. There are also ready opportunities to shape how they interpret and respond to situations, including student behaviors, parent interactions, and professional responsibilities. As a result of their own reflective practices and refining their thinking through ongoing study, principals should be ready to offer insights and wisdom on any of these topics. Being able to relate to and speak to teachers' questions or challenging situations in a personal way is a powerful opportunity

for principals to connect with them, to be seen as a supportive presence, and to foster trust and a positive relationship.

In addition to accumulating their own wisdom based on observations and professional experience, principals should cultivate a wealth of resources to offer teachers to help with specific areas of need, which may include external resources such as books, articles, conferences, and/or podcasts, and it may also include connecting the skills and expertise within the school community. For example, teachers could be invited to observe another teacher who has demonstrated strength in a particular area, or a dialogue could be opened at a faculty meeting to invite teachers to share about their practices and strategies for a particular area. The principal should be viewed as someone who cares deeply and who can offer practical support. Principals who intentionally invest in these ways will reap the benefits far beyond teachers' early years in the classroom. Not only will teachers feel supported, which as this study shows may strengthen teachers' intentions to remain in teaching long-term, but teacher observations may also serve as informal yet important ongoing professional development for teachers. Most importantly, all of these outcomes will benefit students.

This study's findings offer a specific nuance of communication that is important to early career teachers, even beyond their first year of teaching. Teachers value having principals whose behavior is perceived as supportive and encouraging. While this language is broad and could be interpreted in many ways, it suggests that teachers may not be overly prescriptive about how they view support and encouragement. There are countless ways that principals could seek to engage with teachers in supportive and encouraging ways. Principals have daily opportunities to connect with individual teachers and ask questions, to remember details shared in prior conversations, to recognize teachers for their efforts, to celebrate birthdays and personal milestones, to

demonstrate care during challenging times through a note or card, or to demonstrate concern in practical ways such as offering to cover a recess for a teacher who is not feeling well.

Beyond caring for individuals, principals have ample opportunities to demonstrate care for their staff as a whole. Simple examples include canceling a staff meeting the week prior to parent-teacher conferences to allow for extra planning time, providing treats and coffee on a Friday morning, or publicly thanking teachers for their commitment and skill during a back-to-school event for parents. These types of gestures, as simple as they may be, are powerful indicators to teachers that the principal values them, and this study shows that teachers who perceive that they receive this kind of support are more resilient in their longevity.

Another insight about communication from the study's findings was that teachers desire for the principal to have a clear vision for the school and to communicate that to the staff. This type of communication fosters a sense of purpose, which reinforces the very reasons why most teachers entered the profession (Fray & Gore, 2018; Kotowski et al., 2022). Teaching is complex work, and a clear vision helps to make meaning of the work and provides common language and shared commitment for the entire school community. It allows teachers to focus their efforts on what has been determined as most important and to shape the goals that will help to realize the vision. In doing so, it also releases teachers from the pressures of other, sometimes competing, visions and goals.

Having a clear vision may engender additional positive dynamics such as confidence in the leader, understanding of decision-making, and unity within the staff. Similar to the other areas of communication addressed in this section, implementing this as a regular practice for principals should be straightforward and manageable. It is powerful for teachers to be reminded frequently of the vision, and there are ample opportunities within the rhythms of the school year

to do so.

Infrastructures such as staff meetings, professional development days, and email announcements are existing mechanisms for this type of ongoing communication that could be easily utilized for this purpose. For example, principals can begin or end each faculty meeting with a reminder of the vision and can cite specific examples of how the vision is being lived out through the efforts of teachers. Professional development days should include time devoted to equipping teachers to bring the vision to life in concrete ways. Both internal communications and parent-facing communications can highlight examples of how the vision is manifesting in the lives of the students. A vision should be compelling and actionable, with clear outcomes that will benefit students, and as such there should be many ways to incorporate it throughout the school year.

Finally, the study's findings show the importance teachers place on the principal enforcing school rules for student conduct and supporting teachers in this area. Unlike the findings relating to communication, where principals can plan, prepare, and engage intentionally, this finding relates to managing student behavior, which is typically not predictable in the same ways. However, there is much that principals can do to be proactive in terms of establishing school culture and expectations.

Principals hold a great responsibility in setting the tone for the building, both for the students and for the teachers. Being present, visible, and available communicates volumes to the school community about how invested the principal is in the success of the school. Being present and visible allows principals to have a first-hand and deep understanding of the dynamics within the school, which will then inform strategies to intentionally shape the culture in positive ways. Strategies may include fostering relationships with students, forging outside partnerships to

support the school community, developing leadership opportunities for students within the school, planning community-building events for students, or hosting events to engage parents and increase their involvement and commitment to the school. It quickly becomes clear to everyone in the school whether the principal is committed to upholding his or her stated expectations and to creating conditions where the expectations are the norm.

In any school setting, there are many behaviors that can and should be handled within the classroom directly by the teacher, including blurting or interrupting the teacher, distracting other students, or misusing a cell phone. These would be considered lower-level behaviors that teachers should be equipped to address quickly and effectively without needing external support. All of these examples are part of classroom management, which is typically one of the greatest challenges for early career teachers. As such, principals should work hard to provide these teachers with strategies and feedback to support their development in this critical area. The findings of this study demonstrate that early career teachers are not only receptive to informal feedback, they truly value it. Principals should be ready to offer practical suggestions for common classroom management challenges that new teachers face such as establishing expectations and classroom routines, calling for students' attention, and facilitating effective transitions.

If principals do all of this well, setting the tone for school culture and helping teachers manage low-grade behaviors within the classroom, then what remains is to follow through with the stated expectations and responses for discipline situations that require support beyond the classroom. Teachers need to have a clear understanding of how to obtain help when needed (e.g., a phone call to the main office or a text to a Dean of Students), and equally as important, they need to have confidence that when help is needed it will be available in a timely manner. When

support arrives, the behavior issue should be addressed quickly and efficiently so instruction can resume, which may include removing the student from the classroom.

These immediate steps are critical for instilling a sense of security and confidence in teachers, but even after the immediate situation has been addressed, support is still needed. In many situations, consequences may need to be issued and parents need to be informed. Principals can show strong support for teachers in how they handle these steps. For example, a perception of taking the “side” of a student or not administering consequences will deteriorate trust between the teacher and principal. A principal may have a different perspective from a teacher about a student’s behavior and the consequences that should follow, but the principal should work hard to communicate that perspective clearly to the teacher and to be seen as a partner in addressing student behaviors.

Parent communication is a critical component of the discipline process and represents yet another opportunity for principals to support teachers. Principals are wise to consider how the message and information about student behavior situations are communicated, including the specific role of the teacher. If the behavior is diminished or if excuses are provided, teachers may feel undermined in their authority. On the other hand, teachers will likely feel supported if the behavior is clearly described, including why it was unacceptable, the efforts of the teacher to address the behavior, the impact on the classroom, and the resulting consequences.

Principals who respond consistently and predictably to disciplinary situations in ways that clearly uphold the school rules will generate confidence and a sense of security for teachers. Discipline situations are critical opportunities for principals to support teachers. Whether the principal is the person directly responsible for handling student discipline or whether the principal oversees others who handle these situations such as a Dean or Vice-Principal,

ultimately the principal must set the tone and expectations for student behavior as well as the norms and expectations for responding to student misbehavior. When this is done well, it creates security for teachers and favorably impacts their longevity plans.

In summary, principals should make their relationships with teachers a priority—in particular their relationships with early career teachers. Burnout is a cumulative process, gradually building over a period of time (Lee & Eissenstat, 2018). Therefore, support provided by principals must be continually sustained over time. Certainly, principals are not the singular variable contributing to teacher burnout and subsequent attrition, but the research is clear that principals play an important role in how teachers consider their long-term professional intentions.

Principals have a unique opportunity to invest in teachers in meaningful ways, and they should view supporting teachers as one of their primary responsibilities. The beauty of this research is that the recommendations are actionable and easily implemented and sustained. The results point principals to simple, yet potentially profound, actions that will yield increased teacher retention. Committing to supporting teachers is not tied to funding, nor does it require specialized materials, infrastructure, or expertise. It simply requires ongoing attention and priority to the work of caring for teachers.

Preparation and Training for New Principals

The insights provided by the findings of this study also have strong implications for the pipeline of aspiring school principals. Orienting new principals to the significance of their role as it relates to teacher retention is a critical strategy. Principals who enter the profession with a clear understanding of their role as it relates to teacher support on Day 1 will be set up for greater success. Their attention to supporting teachers, and particularly supporting early career teachers,

will yield more stable staffing and stronger student outcomes. Unlike the vicious cycle of burnout, attrition, shortages, and negative student impacts, these principals may then enjoy a different cycle of thriving teachers, fewer openings for teachers, and all of the benefits that have been previously shared.

The responsibilities that fall within the purview of school principals are many. Given the clear impact that principals have on teachers' persistence to remain in teaching, principals must understand that their primary role is to effectively manage people more than systems or operations. Rather than treating this as a single topic to be addressed within the preparation program, teacher support must be a recurring theme throughout the entirety of the program and connected explicitly to the other responsibilities for which they are being prepared.

Every topic within a principal preparation program provides a unique opportunity to examine the teacher experience and how principals might be perceived as supportive of teachers. Many topics readily lend themselves to these connections. For example, coursework focusing on curriculum, instruction, and assessment could easily incorporate the findings relating to teachers' desire for supportive communication and meaningful feedback, or coursework focusing on leadership and ethics could address the concepts of supportive and encouraging behavior that help to foster a positive climate, or coursework on addressing student needs could tie in the findings about the importance of principals enforcing school rules and supporting them in their classrooms.

Even topics such as school finance, budgeting, policy, or governance can connect to the results of this research study. Although these topics may at first seem removed from the day-to-day life of a teacher, in actuality they have a tremendous impact on teachers. School finance has a direct impact in terms of staffing, class sizes, student supports available, curriculum

and resources, technology, classroom supplies and furniture, and much more. It is valuable for teachers to be aware of changes in funding, whether good or bad; surprises and changes with short notice only increase anxiety and a sense of instability for teachers. Rather, if they are aware of upcoming changes as a result of funding, they can mentally prepare, collaborate with colleagues, and perhaps take steps to mitigate any negative impacts.

Communication about policy and governance are similar; regardless of whether changes are perceived as beneficial or detrimental, it is important for teachers to understand the political and policy landscape as it relates to their work. This includes changes to testing requirements, academic standards and curriculum, and professional development or relicensure requirements, as well as changes to the local school board or leadership. All of these things impact the day-to-day work of teachers, and therefore they should be informed in real-time about possible changes, which also allows teachers to be part of these processes through advocacy or further study if they choose.

As aspiring principals are learning about these important topics, beyond establishing a commitment to engaging teachers on these topics, they should also be considering how to communicate with teachers about these issues in intentional and thoughtful ways and in ways that would be perceived as supportive by teachers. In doing so, and in keeping with the results of this research, training new principals to have a teacher-focused orientation in every situation will yield strong benefits in terms of teacher retention.

In addition to coursework, most principal preparation programs require clinical or field-based experience, and this represents another excellent opportunity to cultivate the skills and attitudes that principals need to effectively support teachers. As they engage with a variety of school settings as part of their preparation program, they will have opportunities to observe

practicing principals, and these experiences should be paired with required observations and reflections, pressing them to consider the impact of principals' actions (or lack of actions) on the teachers in that setting. For example, while shadowing a currently practicing principal, the aspiring principal could be asked to analyze how much time was dedicated to teacher engagement and support, recognizing that it can happen in many different ways including direct conversations, classroom visits, planned meetings, or email communications. This would allow the aspiring principal to assess the amount of teacher-focused time as compared to the amount of non-teacher-focused time. It would be valuable to hear directly from the host principal about his or her perceptions regarding the depth and types of teacher support offered. These conversations, coupled with the observations, could serve as the foundation for powerful reflective analysis about the tone and culture of the teacher community within the school. All of these steps will orient aspiring principals to continuously consider the teacher experience, which will prepare them well as they move into the role of a school principal, likely resulting in stronger teacher retention.

Policies and Standards Governing the Role of School Principals

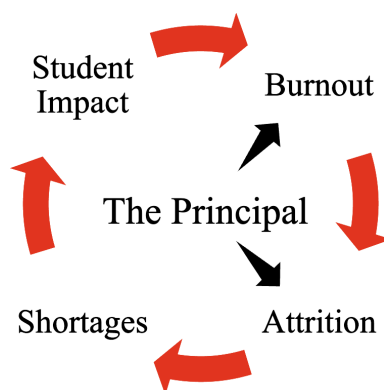
The Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL) provide a framework for understanding the complex role of school principals, and they give attention to the importance of supporting teachers (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015). The central focus of the PSEL standards is students' achievement, stating that principals "must approach every teacher evaluation, every interaction with the central office, every analysis of data with one question always in mind: How will this help our students excel as learners?" (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015, p. 3).

The PSEL standards are robust and comprehensive, and they provide more emphasis on

teacher support than many state-specific principal preparation standards. However, given what is already known about the myriad of negative repercussions from teacher attrition as well as the findings of this study about the role principals play in interrupting the cycle leading to teacher attrition, perhaps PSEL's central focus needs to be expanded to include teacher support.

Figure 1

Interrupting the Current Cycle



Expanding in this way would not diminish the ultimate goal of student growth and learning; it would simply acknowledge the role of teachers to accomplish that goal and the role of principals to help foster the conditions for teachers to do that work. Certainly, principals are not the singular cause for teacher attrition, but it is appropriate to name the fact that they indeed are a variable.

PSEL could be further strengthened by including language that explicitly names the behaviors identified in this study that enhance teacher retention. Given the findings of this study, it would be appropriate to explicitly name the types of principal behaviors that impact teachers' intentions to remain in teaching. For example, two standards refer to principals' responsibilities regarding student conduct; one is found in the Equity and Cultural Responsiveness domain and the other is found in the domain called Community of Care and Support for Students (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015). These standards are appropriate and necessary, but neither make a connection to teachers nor recognize the impact of student conduct

on the teacher experience. A possible remedy would be to include language about student behavior within the domain called Professional Community for Teachers and Staff domain; perhaps a new standard could state, “Support teachers and staff by establishing and maintaining clear rules and expectations for student behavior.”

Similarly, PSEL already includes a standard within the Professional Community for Teachers and Staff domain that cites the importance of a professional culture, including having shared vision, trust, open communication, and continuous improvement (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015). The findings from this study suggest that policymakers should include more explicit language to orient aspiring principals to the impact of these behaviors on teacher retention. The leading idea should be teacher retention, followed by specific actions that will promote perceptions of support. Perhaps a new standard could state that principals must work to “Increase retention by providing meaningful support to teachers and staff through ongoing communication, vision, and feedback.”

Finally, as noted in Chapter 2, standards governing principal preparation and licensure are highly variable across states. After clarifying the central role and strengthening the language specific to teacher support, states should be incentivized through federal grants or other funding mechanisms to demonstrate alignment with the PSEL standards. Principal evaluation systems represent another opportunity to embed and require the PSEL standards. In addition to naming and valuing standards relating to teacher support, this approach would create accountability for principals and would help to ensure that the standards are truly implemented within each school community. It would also create a strong connection between principals’ preparation and their understanding of their role and daily expectations.

Regardless of the mechanism used to achieve greater uniformity in standards across all

states, having these standards as a common and foundational understanding of the role of school principals will strengthen and unify the pipeline of new principals across the country, and as a result may help to interrupt the nation's teacher shortage crisis.

Theoretical Implications

In Chapter 2, Maslach's burnout theory was introduced as a lens to better understand teachers' experiences and perceptions that impact attrition. Maslach's Burnout Inventory for Educators measures three dimensions of burnout, and the results of this survey suggest compelling connections between each of these dimensions and the role of school principals in the pursuit of strengthening teacher retention.

Emotional Exhaustion

Emotional exhaustion is the first dimension in Maslach's (Maslach & Jackson, 1981) burnout theory and refers to "physical exhaustion and the lack of emotional resources necessary to accomplish work-related responsibilities" (McLean et al., 2019, p. 504). Of the three dimensions in Maslach's (Maslach & Jackson, 1981) theory, this dimension is often viewed as the central characteristic leading to burnout and as such is the most commonly discussed (Lee & Eissenstat, 2018). Prior researchers have established a correlation between teachers who rate their principal or supervisor as supportive with decreased reports of emotional exhaustion as well as stronger retention (Collie et al., 2018).

Data generated from this study affirms the findings from prior bodies of research. Three of the research questions related to teachers' sense of emotional well-being to this dimension of Maslach's theory: RQ1: Perceptions of having received supportive communication from principals or other school administrators during the first year of teaching; RQ3: Perceptions of their school administrators' behavior as supportive and encouraging; and RQ4: Perceptions of

their school principals enforcing school rules and supporting teachers. Each of these research questions used the word “support” and focused on a nuance within the concept of support. If, as research suggests, support is an antidote to emotional exhaustion, and teachers who do not experience emotional exhaustion persist in the profession at greater rates (Collie et al., 2018), then providing support should be a high priority for school principals. This study provides insight into the particular types of support that are meaningful to teachers.

In the first research question (RQ1), support was specific to communication; in the third question (RQ3), support was associated with encouraging behavior; and in the fourth question (RQ4), support related to school rules. Research questions 1 and 3 were similar, having to do with the relationship and interactions between a teacher and the principal. The data showed that this relationship is important to teachers and that these direct connections matter greatly. Thus, principals are wise to invest in personal relationships with the teachers in their schools. Relationship-building takes time, effort, and intentionality, but those investments could yield significant benefits by reducing emotional exhaustion and in doing so, interrupting potential burnout.

The fourth question (RQ4) provided additional understanding about an important nuance of support that is meaningful to teachers. This question asked teachers about school principals enforcing school rules and supporting teachers and pressed into a challenging aspect of teaching, classroom management. Student needs have become increasingly complex and overwhelming for teachers, and they report feeling ill-equipped to meet these needs (Kotowski et al., 2022). Having confidence that the principal will enforce the school rules and that the teacher will be supported in the decisions they make in their classrooms relating to student behavior matters to teachers.

Depersonalization

The second dimension of Maslach's burnout theory is depersonalization (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). This dimension captures a critical aspect of burnout and is defined as "negative, callous, and cynical feelings and attitudes directed at students or colleagues" (McLean et al., 2019, p. 504). Arguably, each of the five research questions could relate in some manner to the depersonalization dimension, but the same three research questions that related to the first dimension (emotional exhaustion) offer the most substantial insight into depersonalization.

Each of these three questions (RQ1, RQ3, RQ4) asked teachers about a particular facet of support: communication, encouraging behavior, and enforcing school rules. A favorable response to the questions about communication (RQ1) and encouraging behavior (RQ3) suggest that a positive relationship has been established between the teacher and the principal. It follows, then, that teachers who receive supportive communication and who experience supportive, encouraging behavior from the principal may be less likely to develop "negative, callous, and cynical feelings and attitudes" (McLean et al., 2019, p. 504) either toward colleagues or towards students; the positive relationship between the teacher and principal may help to mitigate negative feelings. Principals who have strong relationships with teachers are more likely to know if negative feelings may be developing and can help teachers navigate and resolve them in productive ways.

The other research question relating to depersonalization was RQ4, which asked teachers about whether principals enforced school rules and supported teachers. Without this confidence, teachers may experience confusion and frustration, both as they view the school culture broadly and as they consider their own classroom management practices within that context. Over time, these feelings may give way to the negative feelings and emotions associated with

depersonalization. In contrast, clear and consistent practices relating to school rules may breed confidence and may assuage the risk of depersonalization.

Lack of Personal Accomplishment

Maslach's third and final dimension of burnout is lack of personal accomplishment (Maslach & Jackson, 1981), defined as "a general feeling of dissatisfaction about one's accomplishments" (McLean et al., 2019, p. 504). Most people who choose teaching as their profession enter with noble intentions, a sincere desire to impact students' lives in positive ways, and a sense of purpose to contribute to society in a meaningful way (Kwok et al., 2022; Rutten & Badiali, 2020). These areas relate strongly to teachers' sense of personal accomplishment, and this study affirms the importance of having teachers continue to be fueled in these areas. Two of the research questions relate particularly to the notion of personal accomplishment: RQ2, relating to receiving meaningful feedback; and RQ5, relating to principals' having a vision and communicating it to the staff.

RQ2 asked teachers to reflect on their first year of teaching, and whether they had received meaningful feedback beyond formal evaluations. As demonstrated in Chapter 2, teachers frequently perceive their formal evaluation systems as inauthentic, and teachers lack confidence in the effectiveness of these systems (Hanks et al., 2020; Paufler, 2018). Prior researchers have shown that teachers enter the profession with an earnest desire to grow as professionals, and the findings from this study suggest that it matters when they believe that they have received meaningful feedback to help them grow. Reliance solely on the official evaluation system appears to be insufficient when it comes to teacher retention, and this study further confirms that these systems do not contribute positively to teachers' sense of personal accomplishment. This disconnect between current evaluation systems and teachers' lack of

confidence in them represents a significant systemic policy issue to be addressed and unfortunately, substantive changes may take a long period of time.

However, principals can address this need for teachers immediately, and in doing so can assuage the negative effects of the current system. This study demonstrates the importance of providing meaningful feedback to teachers. Fortunately, because of their proximity to teachers' daily work, principals can readily find ways to encourage teachers and remind them of the importance of their work. For example, principals can affirm teachers by noticing their positive interactions with students, their effective use of instructional strategies, or their impact on student academic achievement scores. All of these examples are simple in terms of implementation for principals yet are potentially profound in terms of contributing to teachers' sense of personal accomplishment.

Finally, RQ5 asked teachers to reflect on their current year of teaching and whether their principal had a vision for the school and had communicated that vision to the staff. Here again, the findings of this study illustrate that most teachers desire to be part of something meaningful and to contribute positively to a collective purpose. Being part of a school community committed to a clear and compelling vision fosters unity, common language, and shared goals. A strong vision will focus teachers' work and priorities, which also releases them from other potential priorities. As a result, together all of these experiences will very likely yield a greater sense of personal accomplishment, which then can serve as a buffering effect against burnout (McLean et al., 2019).

Recommendations for Future Research

The findings from this study are indeed significant and actionable, and additional study would further contribute to this body of knowledge and implications for action. Clear patterns

were identified across the research questions, and future research may provide an even deeper understanding of the variables influencing teachers' intentions to remain in teaching. For example, the work of elementary school teachers is typically different from the work of secondary school teachers (middle school and high school) in the sense that elementary teachers typically deliver multiple content areas to the same group of students, whereas secondary teachers typically focus more narrowly within one or two content areas and typically teach multiple groups of students within a day. This study was limited to elementary school teachers, and it would be a worthy area for further research and exploration to analyze the questions asked in this study with a sample of secondary teachers.

Because of the alarming data regarding early career teachers leaving the profession, this study focused on teachers within their first 5 years of teaching. While the attrition rates are highest among this population, attrition prior to retirement is a concern even after the first 5 years. Principals would likely be well-served to understand whether the results of this study are unique to early career teachers or if they continue for teachers beyond the first 5 years. As teachers grow and develop, their needs will likely shift, and the specific ways in which principals can effectively support them will also shift. Analyzing the responses of mid-career and late-career teachers would provide principals with a more nuanced understanding and would better equip principals to meet the unique developmental needs of teachers effectively.

Two of the questions for this study asked teachers to reflect on their first year of teaching. The survey was administered beginning in November 2020 and data were collected until April 2021, which means that the sample included data from teachers who had not yet completed the first year of teaching. Given what is known about the typical phases within teachers' first year of teaching (Anticipation, Survival, Disillusionment, Rejuvenation, Reflection, Anticipation), the

responses could be highly variable depending on when the teacher responded to the survey (Moir, 1999; New Teacher Center, 2019). In light of these known phases, similar future research focusing on early career teachers might consider isolating teachers who are near completion of the first year of teaching.

This study used data from the 2020–2021 National Teacher and Principal Survey (NTPS) administered to public school teachers, but the 2020–2021 NTPS was also administered to private school teachers. Given the differences in funding, governance, and oversight between public and private schools, research to compare the results between these two teacher populations may yield important additional insights relating to teachers' perceptions of support and subsequent intentions to remain in teaching.

Finally, a related area for possible study is the number of males entering the teaching profession. As noted in Chapter 4, the breakdown between male and female respondents for the 2020-2021 National Teacher and Principal Survey was roughly one-quarter male (23.2%) and roughly three-quarters female (76.8%). However, in the sample generated for this study, which isolated early career teachers, the breakdown was much more heavily female (93.25%) and just 6.75% were male, which may suggest that the number of males entering the teaching profession is declining and warrants cause for future research.

Conclusion

The teacher shortage issue is not a new issue. Yet decades of research and study have not yielded a substantive positive impact on this crisis, and the current educational system is suffering as a result (Espinoza et al., 2018; Hanks et al., 2020; National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983; Sutchter et al., 2016; Sutchter et al., 2019; Wright, 2020). Of particular concern is the attrition rates for teachers within their first 5 years of teaching (Wang,

2021; Williams et al., 2022). The present study offered fresh insight into the perceptions of early career teachers and the impact of actions taken by their school principals as it relates to their intentions to remain in the teaching profession. Either as preventative measures or as interventions, these insights can be applied immediately to practicing principals in an effort to interrupt the current vicious cycle of teacher burnout and attrition, which in turn contributes to the teacher shortage.

The findings from this study can also be readily applied to the preparation and pipeline of new principals. While modifying the PSEL standards as a universal foundation for preparation programs and making subsequent changes to program requirements may require engaging in substantive policy-making or legislative processes, the long-term benefits are clear from the results of this study. Implementing the recommendations provided in this study will ensure that future principals are both oriented to the role they play in teacher retention and equipped with skills and strategies to meaningfully support teachers.

The intent of this research was to identify ways to leverage school principals in service of reducing teacher attrition and strengthening teacher retention. The findings provide valuable insight as to how principals can engage with teachers and help them retain the initial sense of purpose and calling that led them into the teaching profession. Equipped with the findings from this study, principals could foster environments where teachers continue to believe that the work they do is important and supported. In doing so, perhaps powerful, inspirational stories of teachers such as Jaime Escalante from *Stand and Deliver* (Menendez, 1988) or John Keating from *Dead Poets Society* (Weir, 1989) or Glenn Holland from *Mr. Holland's Opus* (Herek, 1995) will become the dominant narrative about teachers in the United States rather than the shortage currently faced. Principals have a unique and potentially profound opportunity to shift the

trajectory of teachers fleeing the profession. And because of this, there is reason for great hope.

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Appendices

Appendix A: CITI Certificate of Completion

		Completion Date 14-Jan-2024 Expiration Date 14-Jan-2026 Record ID 59120975
This is to certify that:		
Karen Balmer		
Has completed the following CITI Program course:		Not valid for renewal of certification through CME.
Doctoral students - Basic/Refresher (Curriculum Group)		
Doctoral students - Basic/Refresher (Course Learner Group)		
2 - Refresher Course (Stage)		
Under requirements set by:		
Bethel University		
 Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative		
101 NE 3rd Avenue, Suite 320 Fort Lauderdale, FL 33301 US www.citiprogram.org		
Generated on 27-May-2024. Verify at www.citiprogram.org/verify/?w4a42ce9a-91ae-454c-a39a-5b49490b2821-59120975		

Appendix B: Institutional Review Board (IRB) Approval

BETHEL
UNIVERSITY

Institutional Review Board
3900 Bethel Drive
PO2322
St. Paul, MN 55112

February 7, 2024

Karen Balmer
Bethel University
St. Paul, MN 55112

Re: Research Project: *From Teacher Attrition to Teacher Retention: The Role of School Principals*

Dear Karen Balmer,

On February 7, 2024, the Bethel University Level Two Institutional Review Board completed the review of your proposed study and approved the above referenced study.

Please note that this approval is limited to the project as described on the most recent Human Subjects Review Form documentation, including email correspondence. Please be reminded that it is the responsibility of the investigator to bring to the attention of the IRB Committee any proposed changes in the project or activity plans, and to report to the IRB Committee any unanticipated problems that may affect the welfare of human subjects. The approval is valid until February 6, 2025.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Safary Wa-Mbaleka'. The signature is fluid and cursive.

Safary Wa-Mbaleka, EdD, PhD
Chairperson, EdD in Leadership Level Two IRB Committee