

DISSERTATION

WHY TEACHERS STAY—A MIXED METHODS INQUIRY INTO TEACHER RETENTION
FOR MID-CAREER PUBLIC SCHOOL TEACHERS

Submitted by

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ABSTRACT

WHY TEACHERS STAY—A MIXED METHODS INQUIRY INTO TEACHER RETENTION FOR MID-CAREER PUBLIC SCHOOL TEACHERS

Teacher retention is a critical issue for our public schools. Inquiring why mid-career teachers stay in the profession and at their school can provide crucial insight for school leaders and administrators. This study employed an explanatory mixed methods design to investigate factors important to mid-career teachers when deciding to remain in the profession and at a specific site. The first stage of this study included a secondary analysis of the 2024 Teaching and Learning Conditions Colorado (TLCC) survey. The analysis centered on three questions regarding recommending a school as a good place to work, plans for the following school year, and what most impacted that decision. After the completion of the analysis, four research questions were identified to drive the qualitative stage of the study. The first two questions for the qualitative stage sought to identify reasons teachers stayed at a specific site and in the profession and to identify support for Mason and Matas's Four Capital Theory Model for teacher retention. The final two questions sought to understand the actions of school leaders and school staff, as these two factors were identified as the most important in the analysis of the TLCC data.

One significant finding of the TLCC analysis was that recommending a school as a good place to work strongly indicated whether a teacher planned to return to the same school for the following year. Furthermore, school leadership and school staff were the most influential factors in teachers' decisions, regardless of whether they planned to return to the same school (stayers)

or planned to continue teaching at a different school (movers). The thematic analysis of the qualitative data also led to some significant findings, which support those found in the first stage of the study. Evidence for 9 of the 13 themes within Mason and Matas's Four Capital Theoretical Model was found in support of the model. Evidence supporting the additional themes of love and altruism and their impacts on teacher retention was also present. Five actions of school leaders were identified as being important to mid-career teachers. They are: 1) being present and involved, 2) trusting teachers and earning trust in return, 3) aligning with teachers' values, 4) setting the tone for the school's climate and culture, and 5) providing support. Five actions of school staff were also identified as important when teachers consider recommending their schools as a good place to work. They are: 1) being friendly and welcoming, 2) sharing values, 3) providing support, 4) embracing a culture of exploration and collaboration, and 5) having strong teams.

To increase teacher retention among mid-career teachers, we must rely on the leaders and staff within our schools. School leaders and school staff play vital roles in creating schools where teachers want to teach. Together, they hold the key to teacher satisfaction and career longevity. Positive work environments led by engaged leaders are essential for teachers when deciding to recommend their school as a good place to work and return to the same school for the following year.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Teacher retention and attrition are of great concern for those interested in preserving accessible, high-quality public education in our communities. Without experienced, knowledgeable mid-career teachers, students and school communities alike suffer. When schools lose experienced teachers, vacancies sometimes remain unfilled or are filled with inexperienced or unqualified teachers, which impacts every aspect of the school community. Conversely, school communities can thrive when schools are fully staffed with dedicated teachers who are satisfied with their jobs.

Teacher retention and attrition are relatively new fields of study. However, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) found that between the 2011-2012 school year and the 2012-2013 school year, about eight percent of teachers moved schools, while another eight percent of teachers left the profession entirely (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022). These rates have remained stagnant, as the same percentages were reported for the 2020-21 and 2021-22 school years (Taie & Lewis, 2023). However, in the state of Colorado, the teacher turnover rate from 2018-19 to 2019-2020 was 16 percent (Colorado Department of Education, 2020). This rate increased to 17.4 percent between 2021-2022 to 2022-2023, indicating that at least here in Colorado, we may be entering a teacher retention crisis (Colorado Department of Education, 2024).

In 2011-2012, there were 3.4 million teachers compared to 3.8 million teachers in the 2020-2021 school year (Taie & Goldring, 2020). While initially we may celebrate that there are more teachers in classrooms today, the number of teachers with three to nine years of experience has declined from 33% to 29%. In contrast, the percentage of teachers with more than 20 years

of experience has increased from 23% to 26% (Taie & Goldring, 2020). This is a potential indicator of a future teacher shortage as fewer teachers are entering the field, and a larger number of teachers are nearing retirement. Further concern is that in the fall of 2022, there were 3.2 full-time equivalent teachers, indicating that the teaching force lacks stability and is constantly fluctuating (*The NCES Fast Facts Tool Provides Quick Answers to Many Education Questions* (National Center for Education Statistics), n.d.).

Why Teachers Leave the Field Early

The Learning Policy Institute found that nearly two-thirds of the more than 200,000 teachers who left the profession in one year left for reasons other than retirement (Podolsky et al., 2016). These losses create a significant concern, if not a crisis, for many school leaders and districts. Ingersoll (2003) refers to the “revolving door” phenomenon in which a considerable number of teachers leave the profession for reasons other than retirement. He states that teacher dissatisfaction and the pursuit of other jobs significantly impact the school staffing crisis (Ingersoll, 2003). The Learning Policy Institute cites inadequate preparation, lack of support for new teachers, challenging working conditions, dissatisfaction with compensation, better career opportunities, and personal reasons as frequently given reasons for the exodus of teachers (Podolsky et al., 2016). When analyzing data from the 2018 and 2020 Teaching and Learning Conditions in Colorado surveys, Seidel found that when a novice teacher changed their response from “agree” to “disagree” for her school being led by an effective leadership team, the likelihood of that teacher leaving the profession nearly tripled (Seidel et al., 2022).

Gillani et al. (2022) asserted that the significant stress teachers face also impacts retention. When considering stress specific to teachers, they state

Sources of stress among teachers are varied, including those unique to the profession such as overemphasis on academic testing, student behavioral problems, and other stressors such as lack of strong school leadership, increasing job demands, limited work resources, and lack of input and control over school policies. (p.2)

Implementing policies and supports to address stress for teachers could have a significant impact on teacher retention. If districts and leaders can better support the teachers currently serving students and potentially decrease job-related stress, teachers may be more likely to stay. When considering that mid-career teachers are less likely to be satisfied in their position than beginning-career teachers, addressing job-related stress is imperative (The MetLife Survey of the American Teacher, 2013).

Burnout and Working Conditions

A survey conducted by the National Education Association found that 55% of teachers are considering leaving the profession earlier than planned, and 90% of teachers identified burnout as a very serious or somewhat serious issue (Walker, 2022). Compounding the issue of teacher burnout is a significant decrease in teacher satisfaction; only 12% of teachers reported being very satisfied with their job, compared to 39% of very satisfied teachers identified by the last MetLife survey in 2013 (Kurtz, 2022; The MetLife Survey of the American Teacher, 2013). This survey also found that “teacher satisfaction has declined to its lowest point in 25 years...and has now dropped 23 percentage points since 2008” (p.45). A study conducted by the Center on Educational Policy found that almost half of the teachers surveyed “would leave teaching soon if they could get a higher-paying job” (Rentner et al., 2016, p. 4).

One potential reason for the increased rates of burnout and teacher turnover is the COVID-19 pandemic, since working conditions endured during the pandemic may have significantly increased the percentage of teachers who planned to leave the profession altogether. Steiner and Woo (2021) found that one in four teachers intended to leave teaching at the end of the 2021

school year, compared to one in six teachers before the pandemic. Additionally, teachers stated that working conditions during the pandemic were linked to higher levels of stress in the profession (Steiner & Woo, 2021). A survey conducted by the American Educational Research Association found that during the global pandemic, teachers in the United States were 40 percent more likely than healthcare workers to report anxiety (Kush et al., 2022). Gillani et al. found that 43 percent of K-12 teachers reported a greater intention to leave the profession (Gillani et al., 2022). As we continue to navigate learning loss attributed to COVID-19, losing a significant number of well-qualified, experienced teachers would dramatically impact the educational landscape of the United States.

Variation Across School Settings

Unfilled vacancies affect urban, suburban, and rural schools differently. Ingersoll and Tran (2023) found that 75 percent of principals at rural secondary schools reported having teaching vacancies at the beginning of the school year, with over half reporting that they had serious difficulty filling those positions (Ingersoll & Tran, 2023). During six years beginning in 1999, 70 percent of new teachers in Philadelphia left the district (Carroll, 2007). Further research finds “higher turnover rates in the South; among mathematics, science, special education, English language development, and world languages teachers; in schools serving students of color and from low-income families; and among teachers of color” (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019, p. 1). Of note is that hiring difficulties are reportedly steady across all school types. However, Ingersoll and Tran (2023) found that significant variation in the degree of staffing difficulties, even within the same school district, can be attributed to a single factor: the school’s poverty level. They state:

Our analyses document that the poverty level of schools is one of the strongest correlates of their degree of staffing difficulties; high-poverty schools are far more likely to have

serious staffing difficulties than low-poverty schools. In other words, within the same state, locale, teacher labor market, and licensure and pension systems, the extent of shortages varies greatly among different schools. (p. 412).

These findings highlight the role the school principal plays in creating a positive work environment and culture, specifically in high-poverty schools. Johnson et al. (2012) found in a large-scale quantitative study that, on the surface, it appears that teachers flee high-poverty schools at higher rates when compared to other schools. After deeper analysis, researchers concluded that teachers flee the working conditions often associated with these schools rather than the students themselves; “mounting evidence suggests that the seeming relationship between student demographics and teacher turnover is driven, not by teachers’ responses to their students, but by the conditions in which they must teach and their students are obliged to learn.” (Johnson et al., 2012, p. 2). While we may not be able to impact the financial resources of our students’ families, school leaders are largely responsible for the working conditions they allow to flourish in their buildings. While daunting, this serves as a call for school leaders to prioritize school culture and learning communities so that teachers feel supported and desire to stay at their school.

Equity in Teacher Attrition and Retention

As the demographics of the American public school student body shift to become more diverse, white, middle-aged women continue to dominate the teaching field. From 2012 to 2022, the percentage of students who identify as “White” decreased from 51 percent to 44 percent while the percentage of students who identify as “Black” decreased from 16 percent to 15 percent (National Center for Education Statistics, 2024). Meanwhile, the percentage of students who identify as “Hispanic” increased from 24 percent to 29 percent, and the percentages of students who identify as “Asian” or “More than two races” also increased during the same period

(National Center for Education Statistics, 2024). However, nearly 80 percent of teachers are white; the average teacher is 43 years old and has about 14 years of experience (Taie & Goldring, 2020). While the percentage of first-year teachers who identify as teachers of color has increased over the last few decades, it has not kept pace with the growing diversity of America's public school student population (Carver-Thomas, 2018; Gold & Nguyen, 2020). The Albert Shanker Institute (2015) found that while, "the minority share of the American teaching force—including Black, Hispanic, Asian and Pacific Islander, American Indian and multiracial teachers—has grown from 12 percent to 17 percent" over the last 25 years, the percentage of minority students of the American student population grew to almost half during the same period (Bond et al., 2015, p. 2). This lack of diversity in the teaching force can be harmful to students. The Albert Shanker Institute asserts that "all students benefit from being educated by teachers from a variety of different backgrounds, races and ethnic groups, as this experience better prepares them to succeed in an increasingly diverse society." (Bond et al., 2015, p. 1). While teacher preparation programs and hiring committees need to evaluate strategies to welcome a more diverse population into the profession, school districts and leaders need to determine strategies for retaining qualified, experienced teachers of color. Unfortunately, teachers of color leave the profession at an increased rate when compared to White teachers (Bond et al., 2015). They also tend to move schools more frequently than White teachers, which may be a reflection of working conditions within the schools in which they teach (Carver-Thomas, 2018). A longitudinal study from 2004-2015 found that Black elementary and middle school teachers in North Carolina frequently worked in schools that "had weaker principal leadership, less effective mentoring, and lower-quality professional development" (Sun, 2018, pp. 8–9). This is particularly problematic as research has shown that minority teachers are motivated to work in

higher-poverty schools and hold minority students to higher academic expectations (Carver-Thomas, 2018). Additionally, students of all backgrounds benefit, and racial stereotypes are reduced, when all students are educated by teachers of diverse backgrounds (Bond et al., 2015).

In Ingersoll's 2004 article, "Why do high-poverty schools have difficulty staffing their classrooms with certified teachers?", he stated that as much as twenty percent of the faculty at a high-poverty school, especially in an urban community, leave each school year, meaning that it is not unlikely that the entire staff of a school could turn over in just a few short years (Ingersoll, 2004). This is especially concerning given that these positions can be difficult to fill and remain vacant for extended periods. Villegas and Irvine (2010) state that:

The evidence suggests that compared to White teachers, educators of color appear to be more committed to teaching students of color, more drawn to teaching in difficult-to-staff urban schools, and more apt to persist in those settings. Thus, recruiting and preparing more people of color for the teaching profession has the potential to not only expand the overall supply of teachers for the most demanding and difficult-to-staff schools but also alleviate the high rate of attrition in those settings. (p.12).

Waddell (2010) sought to explore how to increase teacher retention in urban schools past the common five-year attrition rate, which at that time in that district was about 50% (Waddell, 2010). She concluded that relationships with principals, coworkers, and students are critical to combating the unsustainable attrition rate of urban teachers. By delineating these relationships further, Waddell was able to delve into what makes these relationships matter. For example, "teachers spoke passionately about the relationships, support, and collaboration of fellow teachers" (Waddell, 2010, p. 76). These positive relationships were recognized as helping teachers have a sense of belonging and satisfaction in their jobs. While relationships with peers were a powerful component in the decision to continue teaching, relationships with administrators were pivotal in the teachers' decision to remain at their school. Each teacher participant shared that a primary influence on her decision to continue teaching at her urban

school was a significant relationship with a principal (Waddell, 2010). If we as a community aspire to prioritize highly qualified, experienced teachers for all students, perhaps we should closely analyze what policies and strategies are being used to retain teachers of color, especially those serving in high-poverty schools.

Impacts of Teacher Attrition

Impacts of teacher attrition on student achievement

In addition to the financial implications of teacher turnover, student achievement is impacted as well. Research has shown that when favorable work conditions exist, which are shown to increase teacher retention, student achievement also increases (Johnson et al., 2012). However, the loss of experienced, knowledgeable mid-career teachers has negative impacts on schools, as these positions often remain vacant or are filled with inexperienced and sometimes unqualified teachers. Sorenson and Ladd (2020) found that as teacher turnover increased, student achievement scores in reading and math decreased. These findings are exacerbated when adjusted for students attending economically disadvantaged schools (Sorenson & Ladd, 2020). Additionally, when teacher turnover increases at a school, the rate of novice teachers, those with one to three years of experience, and the proportion of teachers entering the profession on alternative licenses all increase (Sorenson & Ladd, 2020).

Rivkin et al. (2005) also noted that novice teachers tend to have students perform more poorly on assessments, regardless of their effectiveness later in their careers. They state, “Because beginning teachers, regardless of their ultimate abilities, tend to perform more poorly, policies should be developed to both keep more senior teachers in the classrooms of disadvantaged students and to mitigate the impact of inexperience.” (Rivkin et al., Mar 05, p. 450). They called for the implementation of policies that encourage experienced teachers to stay

in the classroom. If we aim to increase student achievement for all students, schools, and districts, we must address teacher retention so that our schools are comprised of knowledgeable, experienced teachers. When compared to novice teachers, experienced teachers who understand the expectations, challenges, and joys of the job are better able to focus on increasing student achievement.

Financial Cost of Teacher Attrition

The estimated cost of recruiting, hiring, and training new teachers in 2008 in the United States was approximately seven billion dollars per year (Shakrani, 2008). In urban districts, the fiscal impact associated with high teacher turnover is estimated to be over \$20,000 per teacher (*What's the Cost of Teacher Turnover?*, 2017). When teachers leave the field after just a few years, this investment is not recouped. However, in recent years, it has become more difficult to reach a consensus regarding the financial cost of teacher turnover, as it varies across urban, suburban, and rural school districts. In 2007, costs associated with teacher attrition ranged from about \$4,300 in rural areas to about \$18,000 in an urban area such as Chicago (Carroll, 2007). To support districts in identifying the cost specific to them, the Learning Policy Institute created an interactive calculator (*What's the Cost of Teacher Turnover?*, 2017). While this tool can be useful for creating budgets for school districts, decreasing teacher attrition will undoubtedly save districts money. In an era when schools are consistently underfunded, it behooves districts to investigate how to better retain teachers as a cost-saving tool.

Furthermore, in 2022, four percent of all public school teaching positions were vacant, with 26 percent of schools reporting multiple teaching vacancies (*Press Release - Forty-Four Percent of Public Schools Operating Without a Full Teaching Staff in October, New NCES Data*

Show - December 6, 2022, 2022). One unseen cost of this is the decline in the varied knowledge and expertise readily accessible across the school. Retaining well-qualified, experienced teachers is critical to the success of our public K-12 schools.

Why Teachers Stay

While the reasons that teachers choose to leave the profession are plentiful, the reasons why teachers stay in the profession may be more interesting. After all, 3.2 million people opted to be public school teachers in the United States in the fall of 2022. While the careers of these teachers range from first-year teachers to those who measure their careers in decades, each teacher has at least one reason why they have committed to teaching for the school year. Research has shown that supportive school leadership, strong collegial relationships, and participation in meaningful work are all reasons why teachers stay in the field (Bryant et al., 2023.; Johnson et al., 2012; Seidel et al., 2022). Leana (2010) notes that schools with strong social capital built from meaningful relationships, “where teachers talked to each other, shared the same norms and had strong agreement in their descriptions of the culture,” have better outcomes in staff retention (Leana, 2010, p. 18).

One area that continues to be explored is the impact of school culture on a teacher’s professional satisfaction. School culture is a dynamic construct with many factors contributing to its success or shortcomings. In research, school leadership is sometimes included in school culture, while other times, it is considered a separate entity. However, there is not yet a clear consensus on the conditions or features that define school culture or effective leadership. Regardless, the relationships between teacher satisfaction, administration, stress, and school

culture and their impacts on teacher retention rates continue to be of high interest to those invested in the success of public schools.

In their grounded theory analysis, Coulter and Lester identified four themes that aligned with mid-career English teachers getting “over the hump.” The four themes are changing over time, seeing the big picture, sticking around, and receiving rewards (Coulter & Lester, 2011). Furthermore, Coulter and Lester (2011) indicated that developing a powerful sense of personal and professional selves increased the likelihood of teacher retention. Strong collegial relationships also positively impact retention among participants (Coulter & Lester, 2011).

Another area of interest for researchers is the role of love as a motivator for being in the profession. While love is fundamentally not an altruistic belief, a connection between wanting to make a difference in the lives of others and loving the work or community benefiting from your work does not have to be mutually exclusive to altruistic work. Bar-Tal (1986) specifies that altruism arises from an intention to help another person voluntarily and without expecting reciprocity. However, he clarifies that his definition “allows an expectation of internal rewards such as self-satisfaction or raised self-esteem.” (Bar-Tal, 1986, p. 6). I argue that the love teachers have for teaching, learning, and positively impacting students lies in this exception. Nieto (2003) found in an inquiry group that love, not just for the profession but also for students, was a common factor for many participants. She states, “Love, then, is not simply a sentimental conferring of emotion. Rather, it is a combination of trust, confidence, and faith in students and a deep admiration for their strengths.” (Nieto, 2003). However, Cochran-Smith (2006) argued:

Many enter teaching for idealistic reasons—they love children, they love learning, they imagine a world that is a better and more just place, and they want all children to have the chance to live and work productively in a democratic society. But these reasons are not enough to sustain teachers’ work over the long haul in today’s labor market and in the

face of the extraordinarily complex and multiple demands today's teachers face.
(Cochran-Smith, 2006, p. 21)

A report published by the Center for Educational Research found that “68% of teachers entered the profession to make a difference in students’ lives and 45% said they wanted to help students reach their full potential” (Rentner et al., 2016, p. 3). This indicates that teachers are frequently motivated by altruistic reasons to enter the profession. Further research into the implications of love and altruism on longevity will add to the discussion about how deeply teachers are impacted by these feelings in their motivation to remain at a specific school and/or the profession.

Site Specific Retention

One area of research that needs further investigation is the rationale for why teachers stay at a specific school. While retention in the field is imperative, longevity at a school can also be valuable and is impacted by a few factors. Precarious work environments, lack of leadership, excessive workloads, and lack of support among colleagues were all identified as factors associated with teachers leaving their work site (Palma-Vasquez et al., 2022). Stinglhamber and Vandenberghe found that when employees experienced favorable, intrinsically satisfying job conditions, including personal responsibility, relationships, feelings of competence, and growth opportunities, they are more likely to feel indebted to their organization (Stinglhamber & Vandenberghe, 2006). Porter and Steers identified five areas that can indicate a likelihood of employee retention or attrition (Porter & Steers, 1973). They include job satisfaction, immediate work environment, personal factors, organizational factors, and job content. While this study included people across many professions and did not specifically include teachers, I assert that the same factors influence teacher satisfaction and retention.

With a focus on new teacher retention, De Stercke et al. (2015) identified ten strategies to increase teachers' happiness in the classroom. Drawing on positive psychology, they argue that increasing happiness, also recognized as well-being, will improve teacher retention; "the reasons why new teachers leave the profession cannot be understood unless we are able to appreciate an individual's point of view, using methodologies that go beyond the manipulation of sociodemographic variables" (De Stercke et al., 2015, p. 422). They arranged their ten ideas into three separate themes: educational advising/orientation, mindfulness, and emotional intelligence, and provided three to four suggestions under each theme as to how to improve happiness for new teachers.

Next Steps

Inquiring why mid-career teachers stay in the profession and at their school can potentially provide critical insight for school leaders and administrators. Learning more about teacher satisfaction and career intentions can lead school leaders and districts to implement policies that extend satisfaction and positive feelings toward the profession. While much research regarding teacher attrition has been conducted, fewer studies have been dedicated to determining the factors and conditions that lead to teachers staying in public education. One leader in the field of research regarding teacher retention and attrition, Richard Ingersoll, has been studying this topic since the early 2000s. In an article published in 2023, he stated, "Teacher shortages are not solely a consequence of producing too few new teachers, but also a result of too many existing teachers departing long before retirement, which in turn is largely driven by school organizational conditions" (Ingersoll & Tran, 2023, p. 398).

I am passionate about the responsibility of our communities and schools to provide high-quality public education for all students. As Nelson Mandela said in a speech at Madison Park High School in Boston, Massachusetts, “Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.” (Mandela, 1990). For students to succeed at high levels, we must retain experienced, knowledgeable teachers who are passionate about education and success for all students. Identifying addressable reasons why teachers choose to stay in the field can help guide leaders in determining how to best support teachers. Our students deserve teachers who are invigorated, excited, curious, and dedicated to growth for all. I intend to further add to the body of research to help address this perceived gap in research to determine strategies and policies to best support mid-career teachers in their decision to remain in their profession and at their specific site. We need more knowledge, along with the motivation, to make positive changes for our students, teachers, and schools. When we know better, we can do better.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review for this study includes nine articles, presented in chronological order of their publication, followed by the theoretical framework for this study. Studies using qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods are all present.

Finding and Refining Meaning in Teaching

The grounded theory study “Finding and redefining the meaning of teaching: Exploring the experiences of mid-career teachers,” was written by Coulter and Lester and published in the *Journal of Curriculum and Instruction* in 2011. They sought to examine the experiences of mid-career English teachers who made it “over the hump,” but were still too far from retirement to focus on it (Coulter & Lester, 2011). The rationale for limiting the study to mid-career high school English teachers was multifold. Both authors had experience as schoolteachers, with one being a former high school English teacher for eight years. They chose to focus on this specific subset of teachers in part because, at the time, English teachers accounted for the largest percentage of the teaching population (Coulter & Lester, 2011).

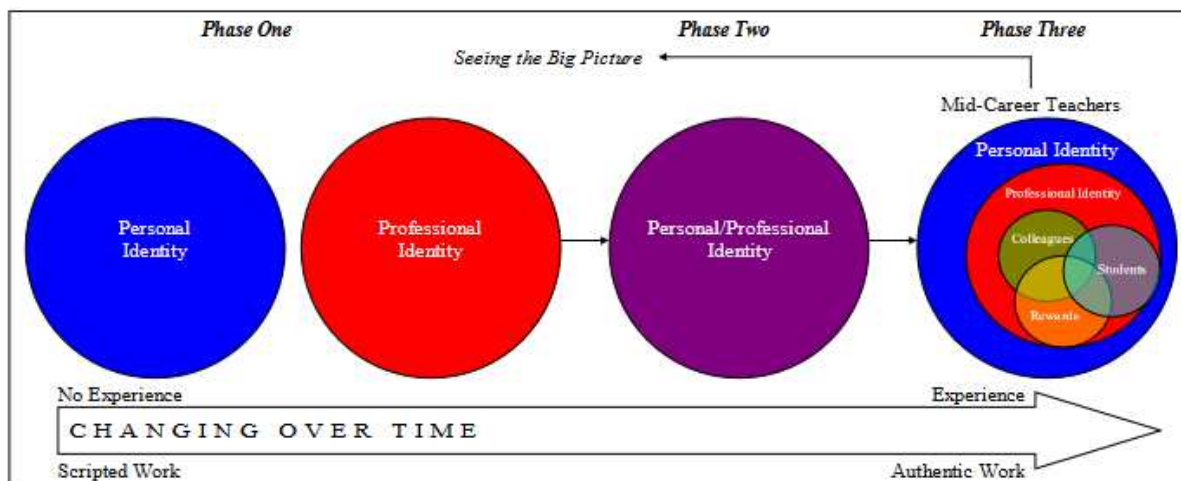
To address the research question, “How do mid-career teachers get ‘over the hump’ and stay in the profession?” Coulter and Lester utilized grounded theory to draw out the stories of eight participants. They argued that “grounded theory research is particularly appropriate when used to gain a better understanding of a given phenomenon” (p.7). Conducting grounded theory research allowed the researchers to reflexively examine, analyze, and collect data without the limitations of preexisting literature that are often present in other forms of qualitative research.

Using purposeful sampling, Coulter and Lester initially identified 32 prospective participants who fit their criteria: current high school English teachers with 10 to 20 years of teaching experience in a county in the southeastern United States. They were intentional about selecting teachers across urban, rural, and suburban settings. Of the 32 teachers initially contacted via phone or email, 10 were willing to participate. However, only eight responded to schedule an interview. Although all were from the same county, the two white males and six white females represented urban, rural, and suburban schools. Of the eight participants, five were department chairs. One 45-to-90-minute, semi-structured interview occurred with each participant during a six-month timeframe. Despite data collection being impacted by data analysis, as is central to grounded theory inquiry, the researchers did not alter the interview protocol; rather, they asked follow-up questions related to specific categories as they emerged.

To analyze data, Coulter and Lester used a constant comparative method to compare within and across the interview data. Initially using *in vivo* codes and an inductive approach, they met weekly to develop an initial code book and a secondary level of coding. This allowed them to synthesize larger data sets and develop categories with subcategories within and across the interview data. They extended an invitation for member checking to all eight participants, and five participated in this process. After these steps were completed, Coulter and Lester agreed upon four final themes: a) changing over time, b) seeing the big picture, c) sticking around, and d) receiving rewards. Additionally, they proposed a dynamic model of the development of personal and professional identities in mid-career teachers' experiences.

Using grounded theory allowed Coulter and Lester to remain centered on participants' answers, "to derive a theory of a particular phenomenon, grounded in the words of the participants" (p.7). Participants' experiences, rather than preexisting literature or conceptual

frameworks, led to the emergent process of data interpretation. After determining the four themes present in the data, Coulter and Lester created a model of the identity development process mid-career teachers experience personally and professionally (Figure 1).



Reprinted from Coulter and Lester, 2011

Figure 1

Model of Development of Mid-career Teacher Identity and Persistence

This model is dynamic and not linear as they argue that the process is individualized for each teacher and phases may be experienced concurrently. This model can help policymakers and administrators better understand and support mid-career teachers in helping them “get over the hump” and remain in the profession.

The methodological design of the study had some significant strengths. First, they cite that a large body of research has already been conducted regarding why teachers leave the profession, while less research has been done to determine why teachers stay. Being former teachers themselves, the content of the study was of high interest to them. To combat unintentional biases, they met weekly, invited College of Education colleagues to critique their work and findings, and used member checking with the participants. Although their sample criteria were strict, allowing only 32 possible participants to be initially contacted, eight of the

ten who were willing to participate did so, which created a higher rate of participation than the initial subgroup. Choosing to use the same interview protocol for all participants and adding follow-up questions as themes emerged created an opportunity for the researchers to truly understand how “teachers made sense of their daily work and development of teachers over time” (p.7). The interview protocol was included in the article, and all questions were open-ended, which aligned with their aim to understand the teachers’ experiences.

Some limitations of this study are also present. The small subset of teachers, consisting only of mid-career high school English teachers in one county in the southeastern United States, sheds light only on the experiences of those teachers. While grounded theory aims to highlight the personal experiences of the participants, it can be difficult to draw connections between the findings of the study and possible action steps or other studies.

Teacher Retention and Working Conditions

“How context matters in high-need schools: The effects of teachers’ working conditions on their professional satisfaction and their students’ achievement,” written by Johnson et al., investigates the conditions in which teachers are professionally satisfied and opt to remain at their current schools. This article was published in the monthly peer-reviewed journal, *Teachers College Record*, in 2012. The research questions were:

- 1) Do the conditions of work in Massachusetts public schools affect teachers’ satisfaction with their jobs and their career plans?
- 2) Are schools with better conditions of work more successful in raising student performance than schools with less supportive working conditions?
- 3) If the conditions of work are important, what elements of the work environment matter the most?

For this study, researchers analyzed data from the 2008 Massachusetts Teaching, Learning, and Leading Survey (MassTeLLS), demographic data, and student achievement data. The MassTeLLS survey consists of 87 multiple-choice or Likert scale questions designed to capture how Massachusetts educators feel about the teaching and learning conditions in their schools, and includes demographic questions about survey participants. This tool was determined to be reliable and valid by the New Teacher Center (2008). Forty-six percent of all eligible teachers completed the survey. Of important note is that the researchers compared their sample population to the greater Massachusetts teaching population and schools and found that on nearly every observable characteristic, the sample nearly matched those teachers who did not participate in the survey. To some extent, this means that their findings can be generalized to at least teachers in Massachusetts. However, the researchers noted that Massachusetts “ranks at the very top of the nation in educational outcomes,” so the findings may not be generalizable to other states across the country (p.8).

To build their sample, Johnson et al. included classroom teachers and other school-based professionals but excluded administrators and individuals working in early learning centers and juvenile detention centers. Furthermore, they restricted the sample to teachers who completed all questions used to create their key working conditions measures and to schools in which at least 40 percent of the teachers completed the survey with a minimum of five teacher responses. After these exclusions, the sample size was 25,135 teachers teaching in 1,142 schools, which represented 61% of all K-12 public schools in Massachusetts. While the survey was anonymous, responses were linked to the school where the teacher worked so that school-level data could be analyzed.

For achievement data, Johnson et al. used the state's preferred measurement to determine student achievement growth, the student growth percentile (SGP), which measures gains on the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS). They standardized the two-year SGP average for each school during the 2008-2009 and 2009-2010 school years. Looking at the overlap of these two rich data sets allowed the researchers to investigate their research questions.

To analyze the data, researchers used standard regression models, ordinary least squares regression, and analogous multinomial logistic regression models. They standardized the responses to the question, "Overall, my school is a good place to work and learn," so that a one-point difference on the five-point Likert scale reflected a one standard deviation difference in teacher satisfaction. They grouped the six possible responses to the question, "Which BEST DESCRIBES your future intention for your professional career?" into a polychotomous outcome with three possible outcomes. They were "stayers" (teachers who planned to continue working at their current school), "movers" (teachers planning on staying in the profession but moving schools), and "leavers" (teachers planning on leaving the classroom, regardless of their intention to stay in the profession). Opting to split responses into movers and leavers provided an opportunity to analyze if there were factors that led teachers to remain in the profession but at a different site.

Johnson et al. then analyzed the data to determine which factors had the greatest influence on three primary outcomes: teacher satisfaction, career intentions, and student achievement. They looked at predictors including student demographics, teacher characteristics, school type, and work conditions. Additionally, researchers were particularly interested in controlling for the correlation between student demographics and work conditions. For each

research question, schools in the top and bottom quintiles for poverty and minority student populations were compared to one another to control for student demographics.

For work conditions, they identified nine key elements to reflect the broad-based conditions of schools. They include colleagues, community support, facilities, governance, principal, professional expertise, resources, school culture, and time (p.13-14). For each element, the internal consistency reliability exceeded 0.7. For each element, three versions were created to use as question predictors. They first examined the teachers' ratings of their satisfaction and career intentions, which were both self-reported. Then they used all the other teachers' ratings from the school to determine school-level averages, but they excluded the teacher's rating. The correlation between the individual teacher's ratings and their peers' ratings for the overall work environment was 0.52. To determine the third version, all teachers' ratings from a given school were used to create a school-level average.

Johnson et al. found strong evidence that “the conditions in which teachers work matter a great deal to them and, ultimately, to their students. Teachers are more satisfied and plan to stay longer in schools that have a positive work context, independent of the school's student demographic characteristics.” (p.2). These findings are critical to dispelling the myth that teachers leave lower-income schools because of the students; rather, “teachers are fleeing the dysfunctional and unsupportive work environments in the schools to which low-income and minority students are most likely assigned.” (p.2). Furthermore, this study found that the social conditions of a school, including the culture, leadership, and collegial relationships, matter more to teachers than modern facilities and current technology. This remained true when controlling for demographic features and explained a significantly greater proportion of variance in teacher satisfaction and career plans than student demographics. The work environment explained nearly

29% of the variation in satisfaction compared to 6% of the variation related to student, teacher, and school characteristics. Additionally, for each standard deviation increase in work conditions, there was a 0.53 standard deviation increase in teacher satisfaction. This finding is critical because school administrators can easily and deeply impact the social conditions within the school with low-cost/no-cost initiatives.

The impact of conditions of work on teacher satisfaction also holds regardless of school type (elementary, middle, or high school), district policies, and salary scales. Furthermore, the researchers attempted to determine the probability that a teacher would transfer based on the peer-average conditions of work. They found that as working conditions improve, the probability that a teacher would transfer decreases. However, as working conditions decrease, there is a rapid increase in the probability of a teacher transferring when conditions fall below the 25th percentile.

Teachers' work conditions also impact student performance. A one-standard-deviation increase in teachers' work conditions is associated with a 0.15 standard deviation in student achievement growth in math ($p= 0.053$) and a 0.20 standard deviation in student achievement growth in reading ($p= 0.004$). The effect sizes are equal to 1.7 and 2.1 student growth percentile units. This is expected as conditions complementary to working are also complementary to learning. Schools with better work environments for teachers show greater student achievement growth when compared to schools with similar student demographics and poorer working conditions.

While each of the nine measures of work conditions had a strong positive relationship with teacher satisfaction and career plans, the measures that address the social context of teaching and learning are among the most important to teachers (Table 1). Collegial relationships

($r = 0.52$, $p < 0.001$), principal's leadership ($r = 0.51$, $p < 0.001$), and school culture ($r = 0.54$, $p < 0.001$) were among the most crucial factors in determining how work conditions impact teacher satisfaction. An interesting side note, however, is that time ($r = 0.26$, $p < 0.001$), facilities ($r = 0.28$, $p < 0.001$), and resources ($r = 0.30$, $p < 0.001$) had the lowest coefficients of regression among teachers who were satisfied with their current positions.

Table 1

Work Conditions and Their Impact on Teacher Satisfaction

	R	r ²
Overall work conditions	0.54*	0.29
School culture	0.54*	0.29
Professional expertise	0.51*	0.26
Collegial relationships	0.52*	0.27
Principal leadership	0.51*	0.26
Governance	0.41*	0.17
Community support	0.38*	0.14
Resources	0.30*	0.09
Facilities	0.28*	0.08
Time	0.26*	0.07

* $p < 0.001$

Furthermore, when analyzed for Pearson Product Moment Correlations, collegial relationships, principal leadership, and school culture each had a correlation coefficient of 0.83 or greater per pairwise combination. This means that these three factors are highly interrelated in

job satisfaction and the social context of teaching, as shown in Table 2. The implications of this research have the potential to be widespread. Johnson et al. state

School culture is developed, enacted, and supported by both the principal and the teachers... Teachers' collegial interactions are made possible by a principal who encourages them to work together, ensures that they have time to do so, and brokers their relationships. (p. 29).

Table 2
Pearson Product Moment Correlations for Peer-Average Ratings for Colleagues, Principal, and School Culture

	Colleagues	Principal	School Culture
Colleagues	1.000		
Principal	0.874	1.000	
School Culture	0.832	0.891	1.000

However, the researchers recognize that the principal is only one of the key factors of the trifecta for job satisfaction, which contributes to the quality of social work conditions desired by teachers; collegial relationships and school culture are also highly important social contexts. Further research should be conducted regarding how to measure the social conditions in which teachers thrive, as these conditions may be difficult to capture with surveys. Additionally, further research should be conducted as to how to adequately identify what exactly an effective principal “does,” how colleagues impact retention, and what elements of the school culture are most important.

Teacher Retention and Servant Leadership

Shaw and Newton’s article “Teacher retention and satisfaction with a servant leader as principal” details the correlational, quasi-experimental quantitative research study completed to

determine the relationship between the level of perceived servant leadership of a school principal, the teachers' level of job satisfaction, and the intended retention rate among teachers. This article appeared in the peer-reviewed journal *Education* in 2014. The research questions were:

- 1) What is the relationship between the level of perceived servant leadership characteristics present in a school principal and the level of job satisfaction among the teachers at that school?
- 2) What is the relationship between the level of perceived servant leadership characteristics present in a school principal and the teacher's plans to stay in education?
- 3) What is the relationship between the level of perceived servant leadership characteristics present in a school principal and the teacher's plans to stay at her current school?

A cluster sampling strategy was used in which 50 of the largest 63 high schools in an undisclosed state were randomly selected to participate in completing an online survey using Survey Monkey. Of those original 50 high schools that were contacted, 15 schools opted to participate. A total of 1,092 teachers from those 15 schools were contacted about participating in the survey via email three times. After the third attempt, 288 surveys were returned, of which 234 were usable for this study. The 54-question survey included questions from the Servant Leadership Assessment Instrument (SLAI) and the Organizational Leadership Assessment (OLA), along with two dichotomous questions about teachers' intentions to stay in education and at the same school where they currently work. The Servant Leadership Assessment Instrument (SLAI) was created by Dennis (2004) and used a six-point Likert scale to parse out teachers' feelings of perceived servant leadership of their principals, while the Organizational Leadership

Assessment (OLA) was created by Laub (1999) and used a Likert scale to measure job satisfaction. Both instruments are widely used and have been deemed to be reliable and valid instruments. Adding the questions about teacher retention should not have impacted the validity or reliability of either survey, and allowed the researchers to use established tools to gain new insights specifically related to teacher retention. No information about the validity or reliability of the combined survey was provided. However, gathering all the relevant information in one survey likely increased the response rate.

For data analysis, the researchers utilized a Pearson correlation to assess the relationships between variables. Due to the dichotomous nature of the retention variable, researchers use a point-biserial correlation coefficient for questions involving teacher retention in their analysis. Additionally, a Bonferroni correction was used to determine an alpha rate of 0.02 instead of the typical 0.05 level of significance for the null hypothesis.

Table 3
Perception of Principal’s Level of Servant Leadership and Teacher Retention

	r / rpb	r ² / rpb ²
Job satisfaction	0.83*	0.69
Intentions to stay in education	0.3*	0.09
Intentions to stay at same school	0.37*	0.14

*p < 0.02

As shown in Table 3, the authors reported a significant positive correlation between teachers’ perception of the principal’s level of servant leadership and personal job satisfaction (r= 0.83, p < 0.02, r² = 0.69). This incredibly high correlation level indicates that 69 percent of

teachers reported that personal job satisfaction can be explained by their perception of their principal as a servant leader. This leads me to wonder about the wording of the question(s) that would produce such an unusually high level of correlation. While still demonstrating a significant positive correlation between teachers' perception of the principal's level of servant leadership and teachers' plans to stay in education ($r_{pb} = 0.3$, $p < 0.02$, $r_{pb}^2 = 0.09$), a nine percent correlation between these two variables is more expected. Coefficients of determination for both questions were considered to be large effect sizes. Furthermore, they found a significant positive correlation between the perceived level of the principal's servant leadership on teachers' intended retention at their current school ($r_{pb} = 0.37$, $p < 0.02$, $r_{pb}^2 = 0.14$). This coefficient of determination suggests that 14 percent of the variability in teachers' intentions to return to their same school can be explained by their perception of the principal's level of servant leadership.

There are a few noticeable limitations to this study. First, only large high schools were invited to participate, which makes it difficult to ascertain whether these findings would be replicated in various school settings, such as small, rural schools. Additionally, it is unclear whether similar results would be found at the elementary or middle school levels. Another limitation could be the response rate: 30% of those schools contacted opted to participate, and 21% of teachers at those schools opted to complete the survey. The article does not address whether the study sample was representative of the greater teaching population.

However, the implications of this study indicate that a strong positive correlation exists between perceived high servant leadership levels, job satisfaction, and intended retention; furthermore, teachers intended to stay at their current schools when the principal demonstrated a perceived high level of servant leadership. The research questions, methods, and analysis appear to be easily replicable across different demographics, including school types, locations, and

teacher longevity, which could further confirm or refute the findings. If additional research supported these findings, it could impact how school leaders are trained, hired, and evaluated.

Job Satisfaction and Retention

Skaalvik and Skaalvik have been conducting research regarding teacher retention for several years. Their 2015 article, “Job satisfaction, stress and coping strategies in the teaching profession- what do teachers say?” sought to understand these topics for teachers in Norway and was published in the Canadian journal *International Educational Studies*. Because most research on these topics had been based on quantitative survey data, Skaalvik and Skaalvik opted to use open-ended interviews to explore how Norwegian teachers experienced job satisfaction and stress, and how they coped with job-related stress and the consequences of such stress. Thirty current teachers and four retired teachers participated in the study. The current teachers taught at one of ten schools randomly selected in one area of Norway. Seven of the schools were based in a mid-sized city, and the other three schools were in the surrounding district. The retired teachers were recruited by asking the current teacher participants if they knew teachers who had recently left the profession before the retirement age of 67. All teachers were asked if they wanted to participate and were told they could withdraw at any time. No teachers did so during the study.

Citing research that teacher attrition occurs in a U-shaped pattern, disproportionately affecting younger and older teachers, the researchers wanted “to gain more insight into how teachers experience their work and their working conditions at different stages of their careers” (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015, p. 181). One young teacher, one middle-aged teacher, and one senior teacher were selected from each school. Teachers were grouped by age to determine if answers varied between young (27-34 years old), middle-aged (35-50 years old), and senior (51-63 years old) teachers. The length of time teaching was not mentioned, only the participants’

ages. The sample was built purposively and gradually to allow for variation in age, gender, and teaching position across levels. The only question in which answers varied enough to be noted was in the strategies that teachers reportedly used to cope with challenges; otherwise, responses were similar across the three groups for the other research questions. Four research questions drove the study:

- 1) How did the teachers describe their job satisfaction and sources of job satisfaction?
- 2) What job-related challenges and strains did the teachers experience?
- 3) What consequences of work-related stress did the teachers report?
- 4) What strategies did the teachers use to cope with work-related stress?

The researchers conducted interviews in the form of semi-structured conversations, which lasted 60-90 minutes. The interviews occurred in an office or empty classroom selected by the participant. To start the interview, each participant was asked about their immediate thoughts about working as a teacher. The participants were then “asked open-ended questions about job satisfaction, sources of satisfaction and dissatisfaction, challenges and strains in the profession, sources of challenges and strains, and reactions to and consequences of challenges and strains” (p.183). Interviews were recorded and transcribed. No additional interview protocol was mentioned or included in the article.

To analyze the interview data, the researchers read and reread the transcripts several times to identify topics and thematic patterns. Statements about job satisfaction, challenges and strains, consequences of strains, and strategies to cope with strains were sorted into four groups and analyzed. Categories were then further refined to combine statements with similar meanings and/or thought processes, and subcategories for each were created. The findings section of the article describes the subcategories within each of the four research questions. As limited

information about how the data were analyzed was provided, the sometimes-conflicting stories participants shared, for example, about teamwork and collaboration, constituted most of the findings section. The number of respondents who made statements aligning with the subcategory was provided, along with a quote from one of the participants, to form each subcategory's findings section.

All teachers reported that they felt teaching was a meaningful job, and they enjoyed teaching and working with children. The theme addressing job satisfaction contained four subthemes: working with children, variation and unpredictability, cooperation and teamwork, and autonomy. The majority of teachers (N=29) reported workload and time restraints significantly impacted their perception of work-related stress, which included adapting teaching to students' needs, disruptive student behavior, value conflicts and lack of autonomy, teamwork, and lack of status. Coping strategies included, but were not limited to, working hard to be prepared (early career), using sick leave (middle career), and lowering aspirations, using sick leave, and/or taking disability pay (senior). One conclusion drawn by the researchers was:

A reasonable assumption is that teachers who are exhausted, who do not share the goals and values of the school, who have to use teaching methods that they do not feel comfortable with, or who are motivated to leave the teaching profession may not be as good teachers as they might have been. (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015, p. 190)

There are some significant weaknesses in the article describing this study. Determining if the desired information was simply not included in the publication or was absent from the study was hard to calculate. No information was given as to how the sample was determined or if it was representative of the larger teaching population. While it mentioned that teachers were allowed to opt out of participating in the study, it was unclear how they were initially chosen to participate. Also of concern was that the retired teachers were found through the currently

employed teachers, which may potentially skew the data gleaned from them. The authors neglected to address their positionality or connection to participants.

Surprisingly, “all participating teachers emphasized the enjoyment of teaching and working with children, and that [teaching] was a meaningful job” (p.183). Since no interview protocol was provided, I wonder how the question was worded to initiate a 100 percent positive response to enjoying teaching, especially knowing that the participants were also asked about job-related stressors and coping strategies. While not all participants mentioned each of the categories of job satisfaction: 1) working with children, 2) variation and unpredictability, 3) cooperation and teamwork, and 4) autonomy, several stated that working with children gave them energy, which aligns with other research findings and supports the current body of evidence that teachers enjoy working with students and value autonomy, cooperation with colleagues, and strong collegial relationships.

The participants' responses about coping strategies for exhaustion from job-related stress are also interesting. No criteria were shared for identifying a behavior or event as a coping strategy. Young teachers' primary strategies for coping were working hard and not using sick leave, whereas middle-aged teachers mentioned working long hours and using sick leave, usually one to three weeks, to recover from the stress of teaching. The primary strategies used by senior teachers included lowering their ambitions and reducing work hours. The reduction in work hours often occurred through the active use of short-term leave or via reduced contracts with or without disability pay. These strategies shared by the participants communicate a need for further professional development and support around how to manage work-related stress in ways that are beneficial to teachers and students alike. Without having the context of the interview questions, I wonder about the validity of these findings as they do not appear to sufficiently

address job-related stress in ways that increase teacher longevity. The answers also appear at odds with the previously identified 100 percent job satisfaction finding.

Teacher Retention and Principal Self-Efficacy

In the article “Principal self-efficacy, school climate and teacher retention: a multi-level analysis,” Dahlkamp et al. investigated the correlational relationship between three variables: teacher retention, principal self-efficacy, and school climate. (Dahlkamp et al., 2018). This article appeared in the peer-reviewed 2017 Winter edition of the *Alberta Journal of Educational Research*, the journal published by the University of Alberta. The research questions were:

- 1) Is there a relationship between principal self-efficacy and school climate?
- 2) Is there a relationship between principal self-efficacy and teacher retention?
- 3) Is there a relationship between school climate and teacher retention?

For the study sample, researchers purposively selected 11 principals and 233 current or former teachers from their schools in a southeastern Texas school district. While principals had to be at their current school for a minimum of two years, the principals reported an average of 6.5 years of experience at their current schools. The teachers were divided into two categories: stayers (N=133) and leavers (N=100). In this study, leavers were teachers who left their current school, regardless of whether they moved to a different school or left education entirely.

Principals completed the Principal Sense of Efficacy Scale (PSES), which was adapted from the Teacher Sense of Self-Efficacy scale created by Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2004). The instrument was field-tested and used in a pilot study before being used in this study. The final survey contained 18 items scored on a nine-point Likert scale. Teachers completed the Organizational Climate Index (OCI), which was developed as a combination of the Organizational Health Index (OHI) and the Organizational Climate Descriptive Questionnaire

(OCDQ). This 27-question survey has been validated in multiple studies across K-12 education and uses a four-point Likert scale. Cronbach's alpha coefficients of reliability for institutional vulnerability, collegial leadership, professional teacher behavior, and achievement press all exceed 0.86 for this study. All data were collected via electronic survey, and communication with participants was limited to publicly available email addresses.

Due to the nested structure of the data, the researchers used hierarchical linear modeling (HLM) to investigate the research questions. Data were split into two levels: level 1 was comprised of teacher-level data, including teacher retention and school climate, while level 2 was comprised of school-level data, including principal self-efficacy. Except for the dichotomous teacher retention variable, all other variables were of continuous measurement. In addition to using an HLM model, researchers ran a one-way ANOVA with a random effects model to determine significance.

Unexpectedly, the researchers only found one statistically significant influence for their research questions. This came as a surprise to both the researchers and their audience. Previous research has found a significant relationship between school climate and teacher retention regardless of the principal's self-efficacy. Perhaps self-efficacy was not clearly defined for principal participants, or the small sample size was prone to skewness. Another possible factor is that almost half (N=100) of the participants were no longer at the school where the principal worked. Because the "leavers" portion of the study was so large, it may have skewed the impact of the principal's self-efficacy on the "stayers" and within the overall data set.

When looking at principal self-efficacy and school climate, no statistically significant relationships for any of the four factors were found: collegial leadership $t(9) = 0.368$, $p = 0.721$, professional teacher behavior $t(9) = 1.57$, $p = 0.15$, achievement press $t(9) = 0.542$, $p = 0.601$, and

institutional vulnerability $t(9) = 1.465$, $p = 0.177$. For the second research question addressing principal self-efficacy and teacher retention, no statistically significant relationship was found, $t(9) = 0.37$, $p = 0.719$ (Table 4). When looking at the final research question addressing school climate and teacher retention, researchers found a statistically significant relationship between institutional vulnerability and teacher retention, $t(221) = 2.898$, $p = 0.004$, as shown in Table 4. However, no other factor was found to be statistically significant.

Table 4
Factors and Their Influence on Teacher Retention

	t (df)	p-value
Principal self-efficacy	0.37 (9)	0.719
Collegial leadership	0.06 (221)	0.954
Professional teacher behavior	-0.03 (221)	0.976
Achievement press	-0.47 (221)	0.636
Institutional vulnerability	2.9 (221)	0.004

The most glaring limitation of this study was the small sample size for level 2 data ($N=11$). Additionally, all schools were located in the same geographic area of southeastern Texas, so it is unknown if other studies in different locations would attain similar results. The researchers suggested that the methods from this study could be replicated in other settings to further examine the relationship between teacher retention, principal self-efficacy, and school climate. While the authors did not find statistically significant relationships between such factors, they noted that further research and analysis were recommended.

The rationale for the inclusion of this study in the literature review is multi-fold. While on the surface, it appears to present findings at odds with most other research about the role of school leadership, school climate, and teacher retention, the authors themselves cite multiple studies that found principal self-efficacy, school leadership, and school climate positively influenced teacher retention in the discussion. These citations include Ndoye et al.'s 2010 study that "revealed that leadership was the strongest predictor of teachers' intention to stay or leave their current position" (Dahlkamp et al., 2018, p. 370). However, this study utilized principal self-efficacy assessments, whereas Shaw and Newton used teachers' perceptions of servant leadership in school leaders. Another reason for its inclusion is that it reiterates the complexity of identifying strategies to increase teacher retention. The one area that had a positive correlation, institutional vulnerability, investigated the relationship between a school and its community, and to what extent the school is impacted by vocal parent and community groups. This acknowledgment of the role that the school community plays in teacher retention is worthy of further investigation.

Critical Events in the Mid-Career Teacher Stage

Another article relevant to my study is "Teacher crisis: critical events in the mid-career stage", written by Katie Cawte and published by *The Australian Journal of Teacher Education* in 2020. This article describes Cawte's narrative inquiry into 20 mid-career teachers/school professionals in Queensland, Australia. The study aimed to further understand teachers' perspectives towards job motivation and retention and answer the question, "Why do mid-career teachers stay in, or leave, the classroom and the profession?" (Cawte, 2020, p. 89). This question mirrors the questions I addressed in my study. The participants were between 30-45 years old and had between 7 and 18 years of teaching experience across state, non-state, interstate, and

international primary and secondary schools. At the time of the study, nine participants were still teaching in the classroom, six were still in the profession but not in the classroom, and five of the twenty participants were no longer in the profession. Limited information about sampling criteria was provided outside of the participant's career requirements.

The semi-structured interviews consisted of eight questions and allowed space for follow-up questions as needed. Cawte aimed to create a profile of a mid-career teacher through the exploration of mid-career teachers' stories; semi-structured interviews allowed participants the opportunity to share their experiences. After the conclusion of the interviews, the data were coded using inductive analysis to identify 32 key themes. These themes were then further analyzed to create overarching categories and main concepts. Ultimately, five key themes were identified: teachers' work, job satisfaction, job motivation, retention, and career progression. The data were also analyzed to identify critical events common across mid-career teachers. Similar to Coulter and Lester, Cawte sought to determine if specific events in a teacher's life impact their career trajectory. Her analysis determined that six events occur in a teacher's career that impact their path. The events include: 1) entering the profession, 2) moving schools and/or leaving in the short term, 3) making decisions within the profession, 4) considering leaving the profession, 5) remaining in the profession, and 6) leaving the profession permanently (Cawte, 2020, p. 81). Also, similar to Coulter and Lester, Cawte discussed the fluidity of these events and the non-linear paths that teachers' careers sometimes take. However, Cawte then aligned the six critical events with Maslow's hierarchy of needs to show that teachers can move up or down on the hierarchy based on events in their lives. Finally, Cawte linked the critical events, key themes, and placement on Maslow's hierarchy with internal and external factors as shared through participant stories.

Using semi-structured interviews, Cawte created opportunities for participants to share their experiences through stories. However, minimal narrative examples were shared in the findings. Rather, the stories were analyzed and dissected for thematic analysis. Perhaps sharing narratives from the participants would have rendered more personalized anecdotes, as is often present with narrative analysis. Nevertheless, the insights into the career progressions of mid-career teachers were fascinating. Of the twenty participants, nineteen had switched teaching sites during their careers, often in the early stage. Additionally, seventeen had accepted positions with additional responsibilities during their career. While some participants maintained these positions, four opted to return to the classroom, and others left the profession, often to pursue a different career or to take family leave.

The most interesting element of this study is that all participants had considered leaving the profession at some point in their careers. Internal factors such as feelings, emotions, and beliefs, as well as external factors such as school culture and workload, were identified as motivators for considering leaving the profession. Cawte states, “The main internal factors influencing the teachers in this study to consider leaving teaching were feelings of stress and exhaustion and the limited long-term options for growth” (p.86). Learning more about the factors teachers weigh when considering leaving the profession could provide valuable insight into teacher retention for mid-career teachers. Knowing why they opted to stay instead of leave could be powerful. While it may be presumptuous to assume that addressing issues that lead teachers to leave the profession may increase retention, attention should be paid to the reasons teachers state as influential in their decision to leave as well as why they decide to stay. Further research regarding how teachers decide to leave the classroom or profession entirely when they are

considering such a change would be beneficial to expanding the body of research on teacher retention.

Supportive Leadership Practices

The authors of “I feel lifted up’: A mixed methods statewide study of educators’ perceptions of supportive leadership” sought to gain insights into perceived leadership practices at schools that were consistently well-rated by staff according to the *Teaching and Learning Conditions Colorado* (TLCC) survey, which is conducted biennially by the Colorado Department of Education (Seidel et al., 2022). This study was conducted by five doctoral students and their four faculty advisors as part of their dissertations. Their overarching research question was, “What individual leader practices and systemic leadership decisions do teachers view as supportive of their work?” (p.11). Each doctoral student had an additional research question specific to their chosen subgroup of teachers, which included charter schools, high/low achievement growth schools, teachers of color, special support professionals, and prekindergarten through third-grade teachers.

Using a comparative phenomenology design, the authors wanted to explore the reasons behind teachers’ positive perceptions of supportive school leadership. For the quantitative data, 35,475 educator responses from the 2018 TLCC survey and 37,536 educator responses from the 2020 TLCC were analyzed. Initial quantitative analysis conducted by the lead author stated that “going from ‘agree’ to ‘disagree’ on ‘This school is led by an effective team’ nearly tripled the odds that a novice teacher reported that they planned to leave their school” (p.4). Furthermore, the analysis of the 2018 and 2020 TLCC data identified a few items that reliably predicted an educator’s response to future career plans, satisfaction with current working conditions, and

opinion regarding the student learning environment at their school. While this quantitative data helps to create an overall picture of each school, the researchers felt that the quantitative data alone was insufficient for determining action steps or practical advice to share with schools. Therefore, the research team determined that qualitative interviews would be beneficial for probing deeper into what teachers consider when they answer questions on the TLCC survey.

For the qualitative data, 55 educators from across the state completed one 30-to-45-minute interview with a member of the research team. Interviews were audio-recorded on Zoom, and each participant was given an identification number, which increased their anonymity. Participants had the option to have their camera on or off for the interview. Zoom transcripts were destroyed once transcription occurred, and transcripts were checked for accuracy. The team utilized *a priori* codes and added emergent codes as needed. To increase consistency, the team conducted calibration sessions after some initial interviews before fully coding the remaining interviews. In total, from 875 pages of interview transcripts, they identified 2,028 coded excerpts using cyclical constant comparative analysis. After processing and coding, responses were analyzed and compared both across the full dataset and within the subgroup foci compared to the rest of the non-foci interviewees. The team was attempting to identify leader actions and supports that were universally important to educators, as well as leader actions and supports that appeared to be important to specific roles/subgroups in education. Four themes were identified with some nuances within each for the various foci groups. The themes were “respect for educators as professionals; collaboratively developing a shared vision; leaders understanding educator roles and responsibilities; and leaders providing both professional and personal supports” (p.2).

Using a sequential mixed method design strengthened this study significantly. By beginning with the quantitative data analysis, researchers identified highly correlated responses

between perceptions of effective school leadership and teachers' intention to remain at the school. Additionally, specific schools that were consistently well-rated by staff members were identified. By using this criterion to narrow the possible schools from which to interview teachers, the research team assumed that they “would get richer data regarding supportive leadership” (p.5). By attempting to explain the quantitative data with qualitative data, researchers were able to better understand the actions and behaviors of the leaders that led the teachers to perceive them as supportive.

The process of using mixed methods for this study is interesting. It is unclear if all the quantitative data analyses were completed by the lead author independently and then brought to the team or if the team also participated in the TLCC data analysis. Clarity around the 55 qualitative participants would have also been helpful; each of the five doctoral students had a different subgroup and it is unclear how those 55 participants fit into each group, other than it is mentioned that some teachers fit into more than one subgroup (i.e. a kindergarten teacher at a charter school). The authors noted that they had a very difficult time finding teachers of color to participate in the interviews, even though the percentage of teachers of color present in the study was reflective of the teaching population in Colorado. Despite these questions, the decision to use mixed methods to address their research question(s) strengthened their findings and increased the applicability of such.

Factors that Influence Teacher Decision-Making

The article “Teacher retention and turnover: Exploring the factors that influence teacher decision-making” was written by Nurul Aulia and Ira Haerani and published in the *Journal of Education Review Provision* in 2022. This qualitative study sought to “identify the complex issue

of teacher retention and teacher turnover in Indonesia based on factors such as remuneration, conditions of service, school climate, self and family circumstance and professional growth” through the use of interviews, focus groups, and document review (Aulia & Haerani, 2022, p. 55). This study focused on factors that led to teachers leaving the field entirely rather than those who switch locations.

Thirty teachers who taught across all schooling levels and lived in three different regions of Indonesia were selected through purposive sampling to create a study sample that reflected the larger teaching population. Participants engaged in semi-structured interviews that lasted between 45 minutes and one hour. Interview questions were intentionally broad and included topics such as job satisfaction, work/family balance, school climate, administrative support, and career plans. Focus groups with five or six teachers were also conducted so that teachers could engage with colleagues to learn about one another’s experiences and commiserate about factors that impact teacher retention. Finally, documents relating to school policies, professional development, and teacher assessment were also collected and analyzed.

The thematic analysis yielded four prevalent themes from the varying data sources. They include 1) remuneration and rewards, 2) work environment, 3) school environment and support, and 4) individual and family factors. Significant support for relevant professional development was also included in the results section. During the analysis, the researchers used both inductive and deductive coding to identify themes within the interviews and focus groups. Using cyclical coding, codes were refined and clustered as additional data were generated. Interrelated codes were analyzed to determine their compounded impact on a teacher’s decision to remain in the field.

This study was the only one reviewed that mentioned the interplay between having a family and a career as a teacher. Participants specifically stated that it was hard to balance the demands of their career alongside the responsibilities of raising children and that relocating for a spouse's job made it difficult for them to remain in the profession. Utilizing interviews and focus groups allowed the researchers to gain insight into the very specific experiences of their participants. This study contributes to the body of research identifying teacher retention as a global issue and reinforces the notion that teachers across the world are impacted by generally the same factors when deciding whether to remain in the profession.

School Leaders' Support and Teacher Retention

The article "How can school leaders retain teachers? The relative importance of different administrative supports for teacher retention in different types of schools," written by Tran et al., was published in 2023 in the *NASSP Bulletin*. This publication is produced quarterly by the National Association of Secondary School Principals. The article describes the exploratory sequential mixed methods study undertaken by the authors to examine the relative importance of various administrative supports on teacher retention. The two research questions that drove the QUAN-qual study were:

- 1) What are teachers' perceptions of the relative importance of different administrative supports for their retention?
- 2) To what extent do the importance of administrative supports differ across school contexts?

The conceptual framework that guided the study was the Talent Centered Education Leadership (TCEL) framework, which is an emerging leadership philosophy for managing

school staff in which leaders are aware of employees' strengths, have high expectations, communicate clearly, and acknowledge that teachers have busy lives outside of work (Tran et al., 2023). To highlight the fallout of teacher retention, they state, "given the public perception of low prestige associated with the education profession...teaching is not an overly attractive calling for many" (Tran et al., 2023, p. 189). Nevertheless, they sought to further understand the nuances of the roles of human capital and social capital in teacher retention, specifically due to the interpersonal relationships that abound within the profession.

There were two phases of this sequential mixed methods study. The first phase consisted of gathering quantitative data through a survey created and piloted by the research team. Together, they identified 13 different types of supports that leaders can offer teachers, such as respect, discipline enforcement, communication, professional appreciation, trust, coaching, peer mentoring, and community leadership, among others. They noted that all the supports were important to teachers, but the degree to which they are important varied. Using a Best-Worst Scaling (BWS method), participants chose the most and least important type of support provided by their school leader. The final survey design included "169 different combinations of the 13 choice tasks. All choice tasks included four attributes, and every attribute appeared four times throughout each design version" (Tran et al., 2023, p. 196). Participants also provided significant demographic and employment information as part of the survey. Researchers specifically asked about school level, retention status, and geographic locale. This allowed researchers to examine results for nuances related to the second research question.

To create their study sample, researchers contacted 19 secondary schools across South Carolina that were ranked within the top or bottom quartile for teacher retention in the previous two years. Twelve schools agreed to participate in the study, and 178 teachers from those schools

completed the survey. Despite the survey data being gathered in 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic, the survey had a 36% response rate. The authors noted that there were no significant demographic distinctions between the group of teachers that participated in the survey and the larger teaching population.

After analyzing the relative importance of 13 administrative supports using a BWS survey, respect was resoundingly identified as the most important administrative support, as all other choices had less than half the probability of being selected as more important than respect when presented in the same grouping. Discipline enforcement and open-door policy were rated as the second and third most important supports, respectively. Community leadership was rated as the least important support for teachers when considering remaining in the profession. While these findings were common across school levels, retention rates, and school location, there were some nuances among sub-groups. An open-door policy was significantly more important to teachers from schools with high-retention rates compared to those from schools with low-retention rates. Coaching was more important to middle school teachers than high school teachers. Communication was significantly more important to urban schoolteachers than to rural schoolteachers. The authors hypothesized that due to their size, larger urban schools may require clearer, more frequent communication with teachers compared to smaller rural schools.

For the second phase of the study, the researchers conducted qualitative interviews with a subsample of middle and high school teachers who volunteered to be interviewed when taking the BWS survey in phase one. Of those who indicated they were willing to participate in phase two of the study, 14 participants were selected through a stratified random selection process to ensure demographic variation within the qualitative sample. Participants completed two 30-60-

minute semi-structured interviews, which were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Questions were designed to develop a deeper understanding of the quantitative findings.

Qualitative interviews provided an opportunity for the researchers to better understand what teachers meant when they identified respect as the most important support and to understand what principals were or were not doing to demonstrate respect to teachers. To begin with, they shared the quantitative findings with participants; none were surprised to learn that respect was identified as the most important support. Many teachers shared that respect encompassed many other administrative supports and was seen as an overarching support. The authors concluded that “indicating respect is perhaps ranked as the most important leadership support because it is a catalyst to access other supportive behaviors” (Tran et al., 2023, p. 205). Teachers spoke of respect as a precursor for other administrative supports, including coaching, trust, professional appreciation, and collegial relationships. Conversely, the absence of respect led teachers to identify negative behaviors of leaders that impede retention, including autocratic decision making, micromanaging, and unclear communication. By gathering additional data through qualitative interviews, the researchers were able to more clearly identify the leadership behaviors that impact a teacher’s perception of feeling respected by their administration.

The mixed methods design of this study significantly strengthened the findings of this study. Through the use of a Best-Worst Scaling survey in phase one, the researchers were able to identify the most and least important administrative supports as reported by teachers. After analyzing the survey data, the researchers used the results to create their interview protocol. Since respect was identified through the BWS survey as the most important support, researchers specifically asked teachers to share what respect looked like during the interviews. Participants were also able to describe work environments in which evidence of respect was lacking. These

non-examples can be powerful for identifying problematic behaviors among leaders whose schools have low retention rates. The methods of this study are easily replicable across various settings, which could lead to additional data being collected to further confirm the authors' findings.

Theoretical Framework

Research into teacher attrition and retention is still a fairly new field (Mason & Matas, 2015). Because limited research exists globally about this phenomenon, prior theory development has also been minimal. In response, Mason and Matas set out to develop a theoretical framework as “teacher attrition is costly, both for a nation’s budget and for the social and academic outcomes of its citizens” (Mason & Matas, 2015, p. 45). In their article, “Teacher attrition and retention research in Australia: Towards a new theoretical framework,” published in the *Australian Journal of Teacher Education* in 2015, they shared the findings of a thematic content analysis of twenty studies. They concluded that a new theoretical model was needed as “teacher attrition is a complex phenomenon, a product of the intersection of elements from social capital, human capital, positive psychological capital, and structural capital” (p.60). Within this model, thirteen themes were identified and aligned with the four types of capital. Human capital includes a person’s knowledge, skills, abilities, and intangible assets that benefit the individual, their employer, and/or community. The three themes within human capital address preservice education, professional skills and knowledge, and ongoing professional development. Social capital encapsulates the relationships and connections among people and is grounded in the “underlying principle that human interrelationships are valuable” (Mason & Matas, 2015, p. 56). Five themes fall within social capital: quality of relationships, quality of leadership, school culture, informal and formal support, and value of teaching/teachers. Structural capital describes

the “role of the context in which teachers work” (p.57). The nature and complexity of their role, employment conditions, school and department policies, and school resources and facilities were the themes identified under structural capital. In other words, physical spaces, schedules, routines, procedures, pay, and teaching assignments constitute structural capital. Finally, positive psychological capital, also called psychological capital, encompasses personal factors such as motivation, satisfaction, and commitment, which are combined to create one theme of personality and psychological factors. Mason and Matas argue for the inclusion of positive psychological capital because it “acknowledges the fact that variables that are internal to the teacher also play a part in their career path choices” (p.58). Their proposed model is shown below in Figure 2.

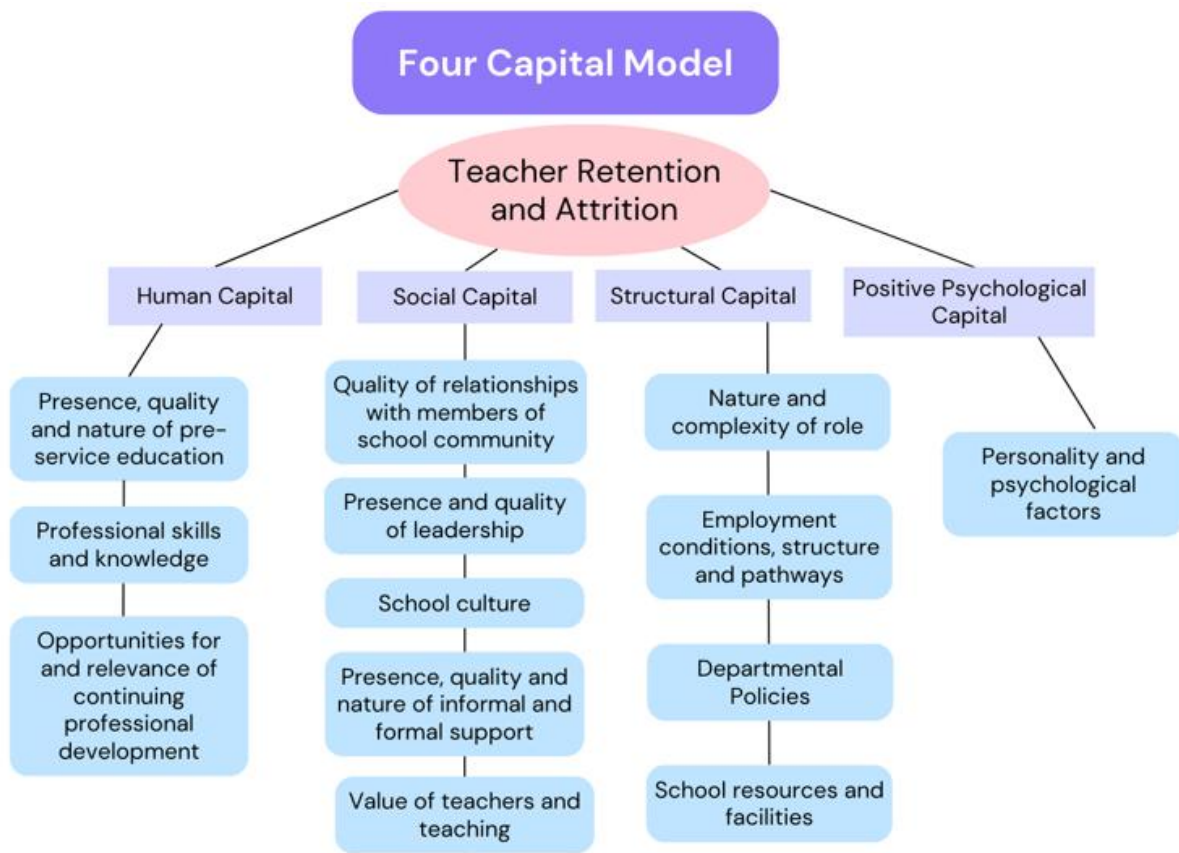


Figure 2
Mason and Matas’s Four Capital Theoretical Model with Themes

Summary

Determining which factors lead to teacher satisfaction and, ultimately, retention is critical for public schools and the communities they serve. These studies each investigated some component(s) of the relationships between job satisfaction, school leadership, and the conditions of work in schools and how these factors impact teacher retention. A common thread throughout each of the articles analyzed is that when teachers are satisfied with their work conditions, they are more likely to continue working at the same school (Cawte, 2020; Johnson et al., 2012; Seidel et al., 2022; Shaw & Newton, 2014; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015). Furthermore, stress and a lack of support lead teachers to leave the profession early (Cawte, 2020; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015). Significant evidence that working at a school led by an effective principal increases teacher retention is also present (Johnson et al., 2012; Seidel et al., 2022; Shaw & Newton, 2014). While Dahlkamp's findings did not support this claim, they cited multiple research studies that do support it.

Each article using quantitative data found at least one statistically significant relationship between a factor of school culture and teacher retention, while three articles reported significant findings for multiple components. One discrepancy I question is that three studies found statistically significant correlations between teachers' perceptions of their principals and teacher retention, whereas one study did not. However, the study that did not find a statistically significant correlation between principals and teacher retention evaluated the principal's perception of herself. Perhaps, if instead of measuring principal self-efficacy, researchers had surveyed teachers about their principal's effectiveness, there may have been a significant influence that would have aligned with the findings by Johnson et al., Seidel et al., and Shaw and Newton.

On the other hand, findings by Shaw and Newton, as well as Johnson et al., suggest that an effective leader, along with positive work conditions, increases teacher satisfaction and, ultimately, retention. While the construct of school culture remains hard to define and quantify, the nine key measures put forth by Johnson et al. are an excellent overview of the factors that impact teachers at work. Seidel et al. cite that a school led by an effective leadership team increases the site retention rate for novice teachers significantly. Recognizing that stress and limited coping strategies, as put forth by Skaalvik and Skaalvik, negatively impact job satisfaction for teachers helps determine how to mitigate those factors to potentially increase retention. Cawte's investigation into the role of mid-career teachers' desire for additional responsibilities and limited opportunities for advancement also provides insight into potential strategies to increase retention in the profession, in addition to the classroom. The attention given to the significance of events that occur in a teacher's life by both Coulter and Lester and Cawte highlights the importance of recognizing the human aspect of teachers and an awareness that teachers are not immune to outside factors when determining if they want to stay in their teaching position and the field. Seidel et al.'s findings echo this humanization element as one of their themes identified included a principal who provided both personal and professional support. All researchers called for continued research investigating the factors that impact teacher retention, including school culture, work conditions, stress, and effective leadership.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

This study focused on mid-career teachers and why they stay in the public teaching profession and at their specific schools. Due to the explanatory sequential mixed method nature of this study, separate quantitative and qualitative research questions were developed. The overarching question and supporting sub-questions used to conduct the quantitative data analysis of the 2024 Teaching and Learning Conditions Colorado (TLCC) survey data are:

RQ1: What are the differences and commonalities between stayers (teachers who plan to stay at the same school) and movers (teachers who plan to switch schools but stay in the profession) when answering questions about whether their school is a good place to work and what most impacts their decision for the following school year?

RQ1a: Is there a relationship between a teacher's perception of their school being a good place to work and their plans after the end of the school year? If there is a relationship, is there a difference between teachers who plan to continue teaching at the school and those who plan to continue teaching at a different school?

RQ1b: Is there a relationship between a teacher recommending their school as a good place to work and what most affects their decision to continue teaching at a school?

RQ1c: Is there a relationship between a teacher's plans after the end of the school year and what most affects their decision to continue teaching at a school? If there is a relationship, is there a difference between teachers who plan to continue teaching at the school and those who plan to continue teaching at a different school?

After completing the quantitative data analysis, the research questions selected to drive the qualitative interview portion of the study are:

RQ1: What factors impact a teacher's decision to remain at a specific school?

RQ2: What factors impact a teacher's decision to remain in the profession but switch schools?

RQ3: What actions of school leaders positively affect a teacher's perception of school leadership?

RQ4: What actions of school staff positively affect a teacher's perception of the work environment?

The methods chosen for a study are critical in determining the analytical strategies that should be used with the data. Looking broadly at teacher retention rationale and the lived experiences of mid-career teachers, I concluded that an explanatory sequential mixed methods approach would best address my research questions. Mixed methods research is an appropriate methodology when a need exists to obtain more complete and corroborated results or to explain initial results (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). The quantitative data analysis guided the development of the interview protocol, which was completed before interviews began. It is included as Appendix A. Since teacher retention is a complex issue influenced by numerous factors, combining quantitative data from a large-scale statewide survey with interviews created a more detailed picture for teachers and leaders alike in the state of Colorado. Creswell and Plano Clark (2018) assert that

The complexity of [the] research problem calls for answers beyond simple numbers in a quantitative sense or words in a qualitative sense. A combination of both forms of data provides the most complete analysis of complex problems. Researchers situate numbers in the contexts and words of participants, and they frame the words of participants with numbers, trends, and statistical results. (p.23)

While large-scale surveys allow leaders, teachers, and consumers alike to gain an understanding of the current landscape of their school and compare it to others across the state, isolated quantitative data does not provide insight into the rationale behind the answers given.

For the first stage of this study, I conducted a secondary data analysis of the Teaching and Learning Conditions Colorado (TLCC) survey, which is conducted by the Colorado Department of Education (CDE). The TLCC survey was initiated through HB08-1384 and

is a statewide, anonymous survey intended to support school, district, and state improvement planning, as well as research and policy. **Schools and districts need more than 50% participation and at least five responses to access their data.** The survey opens every two years for public school teachers, education support professionals (including positions such as teacher assistants and paraprofessionals), school leaders, and special service providers such as psychologists and social workers. (*Teaching and Learning Conditions Colorado (TLCC)*, n.d.)

This survey closely aligns with the MassTeLLS survey that Johnson et al. analyzed and is the same survey used by Seidel et al. in their study, although they analyzed data from the 2018 and 2020 surveys. As a public school teacher in Colorado who has taken the TLCC survey multiple times, the questions aligned with the information I sought to analyze. Critiquing Johnson et al.'s and Seidel et al.'s studies allowed me to think deeply about and draw inspiration from their studies to guide my own. I analyzed data from three specific TLCC questions:

- TLCC Question T 10-1a: "I would recommend this school as a good place to work."
- TLCC Question T 10-2: "Which of the following best describes your plans after the end of this school year?"
- TLCC Question T10-3: "Which of the following most affects your decision about whether to continue teaching at this school?"

Participants' responses to the first question were selected from a Likert scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Participants chose from seven options for the second

question; however, this data was re-coded into stayers (returning to the same school), movers (relocating to a different school), and leavers (leaving the profession regardless of reason). For the final question, participants chose one of eight options to identify what most impacted their decision about returning to the same school for the following school year.

While the quantitative results from the study provided clear insight into the factors that most impacted a teacher's perception of their school and their plans for the following year, I wanted to seek out information about teachers' lived experiences using interviews as Coulter and Lester (2011), Skallvik and Skallvik (2015), and Seidel et al. (2022) did in their studies. I conducted a pilot study with questions similar to those in the final interview protocol before beginning this study. The pilot study consisted of two interviews and a focus group with three educators. None of the data collected or analyzed in the pilot study is included in this writing.

To develop the qualitative data set, I used semi-structured interviews consisting of 11 open-ended questions along with follow-up questions. These interviews provided opportunities for teachers to share insights into their careers and expand upon the findings of the analysis of the TLCC survey, which were summarized and shared with participants during the interview. Through the interviews, I learned about the intricacies of the daily experiences of teachers who choose to stay in the profession and at a specific site. Drawing upon the methods and analytical processes described in previously conducted research studies was vital in developing the methodology for this study.

Sampling

As previously stated, this study was conducted in two sequential stages, with the first stage being a secondary analysis of the Teaching and Learning Conditions Colorado (TLCC) survey conducted in the spring of 2024. There were 45,907 responses from teachers, education

support professionals, school leaders, and special service providers, which accounted for about 50 percent of the eligible population for this survey. For this study, I limited the sample population to teachers working in public schools (not meeting any other type of school as defined by TLCC) who have been teaching for 11-20 years, which yielded 9,064 responses, or approximately 20% of the responses.

For the second stage of this study, qualitative interviews, I used convenience sampling while intentionally not interviewing anyone I knew. To recruit participants, I attended the Colorado Association of Middle-Level Educators (CAMLE) annual conference with about 100 attendees. I distributed recruitment flyers during lunch and gave a quick three-minute pitch about the project. Eighteen conference attendees completed a screening survey, of which 14 responses met the inclusion criteria for the study. When those 14 responders were contacted to schedule an interview, five scheduled an interview and participated in the study. To obtain additional participants, the recruitment flyer was shared with current and past participants of Colorado State University's principal licensure program. While no program participants engaged in the study, they shared the recruitment flyer with colleagues. This led to three additional inquiries and participants in this study.

At the time of the interviews, three participants were teaching at the elementary level, four were currently working at the middle school level, and one was teaching at the high school level. Three participants had previous experience at the high school level. Four participants taught in content-specific general education classrooms, two were Integrated Service (Special Education) providers, one was a school counselor, and one worked with students at the elementary level as a content specialist. Information about race or gender identification was not collected. All participants had between 14 and 19 years of experience, represented four school

districts throughout northern Colorado, and had worked at between one and six schools throughout their careers. Of interesting note is that of the eight participants, seven have been at their current school for at least the last eight years, indicating that most of the school moves came early in each person’s career. See Table 5 for relevant demographic information.

Table 5

Demographic and background information

Pseudonym	C: Current Level P: Past Level	Subject(s)	Years of Experience	Number of Schools
Anne	C: Elementary P: Middle/High	Stem / Leadership	18	6
Becky	C: Middle School P: High School	Counselor	14	4
Catherine	C: Middle School	Math	18	3
Donna	C: Elementary	Integrated Services	19	4
Emily	C: Middle School	English	19	3
Frances	C: Middle School P: Elementary	Integrated Services	18	3
Gary	C: High School	Social Studies	19	2
Heather	C: Elementary	4 th grade	14	1

Data Collection

As this was a sequential study, there were two separate phases of data collection. Upon study approval granted by the Colorado State University Institutional Review Board, the 2024 TLCC data were obtained from the Colorado Department of Education, and recruitment began for the interview portion of the study. The TLCC survey was an online survey conducted biennially. Most recently, it was available to public school employees for six weeks in early 2024. The survey took about 15 minutes to complete. All questions were multiple-choice or used

a Likert scale. A representative from each school in Colorado was provided with a set of unique codes to distribute to employees eligible for the survey. Each survey participant received a code, which was anonymous other than being linked to their workplace. This data collection technique allowed participants to remain anonymous while crating school and district-level data sets. This data set is publicly available online at <https://www.cde.state.co.us/site/tlccsurvey/> (*Teaching and Learning Conditions Colorado (TLCC)*, n.d.).

Between the two stages of data collection and analysis within the study, I refined my interview protocol to consist of 11 open-ended questions and follow-up questions to guide the semi-structured interviews (Appendix A). These interviews were conducted online using MS Teams. Participants chose a preferred location for the meeting and had the choice to have their cameras on or off. I conducted the 30-60-minute interviews from a private location. Participants were sent a \$40 Target gift card immediately upon completion of the interview. Interviewees were invited to participate in member checking, and two participants asked for copies of the interview transcript but provided no additional feedback. Follow-up interviews were not expected and did not occur.

Before each interview, participants reviewed and signed an informed consent form via DocuSign. All interviews were recorded and initially transcribed through MS Teams' transcription software. An audio recording using the Voice Memo feature of my iPhone also served as a backup data collection tool. Collecting multiple recordings of the interviews was beneficial, as technical complications occurred during two interviews and resulted in only one usable recording for those interviews. The other six interviews had both an MS Teams recording and a voice memo recording intact. During each interview, I took handwritten notes. Following the completion of the interview, I evaluated the transcripts for accuracy and updated them as

necessary. All MS Teams and audio recordings were destroyed before the publication of this dissertation. All transcripts, documents, and information related to this study are stored on a password-protected computer and in my CSU-assigned OneDrive data storage system. Participants are only referred to by their pseudonyms, and the only forms of identifiable information include the initial screening survey completed by the participant, the signed informed consent form, and the email address where the MS Teams invitation and electronic gift card were sent. This information was not seen by anyone other than me.

To gather demographic data of interview participants, I inquired about the number of locations where the participant has worked, their current and past level(s) of instruction, and their total years of experience. The interview protocol and questions remained constant throughout the data collection process, with minimal revisions and adaptations occurring in each interview. Nonetheless, follow-up questions were asked based on participant responses and varied accordingly.

Data Analysis

The secondary data analysis of the TLCC survey was conducted using SPSS. Data were analyzed as originally reported on the TLCC survey after the subgroup of data meeting the inclusion criteria for the study was identified. Of the 45,907 overall responses, 9,064 responses were received from public school teachers with 11-20 years of experience. Not every participant responded to every question, so some questions had smaller response sets. The three questions from the survey that were prioritized for analysis were:

- T 10-1a: “I would recommend this school as a good place to work.” (N=8,410)

- T 10-2: “Which of the following best describes your plans after the end of this school year?” (N=8,802)
- T 10-3: “Which of the following most affects your decision about whether to continue teaching at this school?” (N=8,833)

Question T 10-1a was analyzed as initially reported and also re-coded as a dichotomous variable. Responses for question T 10-2 were re-coded as stayers, movers, and leavers to allow for clearer analysis. For question T 10-3, respondents choose between these eight options: length of the workday, facilities and resources, community support and engagement, school staff, school leadership, school mission, district leadership, and salary/compensation. Additional analysis into questions related to school leadership and school staff was conducted as those factors were identified as the most influential in a teacher’s decision for plans for the following school year, as reported in questions T 10-3.

For the second stage of this study, I conducted eight semi-structured interviews. Qualitative data was transcribed and read multiple times. The initial transcripts provided approximately 200 pages of content. After transcripts were trimmed to exclude extraneous conversations and formatted, approximately 130 pages of content remained for thematic analysis.

While initially using a deductive approach for coding, I used *a priori* codes that reflected themes from Mason and Matas’s Four-Capital Theoretical Framework (Mason & Matas, 2015). Their meta-analysis of twenty studies investigating teacher attrition and retention identified 13 themes within the Four-Capital framework. This framework sought to understand teacher attrition and retention in Australia. However, I found its awareness of the complexity of teacher retention insightful. Teachers are complex, and I did not think that I would find a single factor responsible for every teacher’s decision to remain at a specific site and in the profession. Rather,

I appreciated that the framework embraced the nuances of the overlap of four separate capitals. Throughout the coding process, I recognized that teachers were sharing insight outside of the realm of the framework. Therefore, as the need for additional codes arose during the thematic analysis, I also used an inductive approach to create *in vivo* codes when necessary.

Each transcript was coded once using the comment feature of Microsoft Word. To facilitate a more in-depth analysis, I organized a list of participant quotes under each interview question or topic in Word. This additional read-through of the transcripts allowed me to become more familiar with the content. However, recognizing that many of the related quotes were snippets taken out of context, I decided to use the Dedoose coding software for more in-depth analysis. Within Dedoose, I coded each transcript multiple times using an iterative cycle. I utilized the code application and code co-occurrence features to identify frequently used and overlapping codes. After coding in Dedoose, I exported excerpts with the same codes for deeper analysis. Using the comment feature of Microsoft Word, I again coded the excerpts for themes and subthemes, noting which participants shared insights relevant to the themes. However, most of the additional codes created in Word were for organization. For example, excerpts identified with the “relationship” code in Dedoose were further analyzed to determine the nature of the relationship (i.e., administrative relationship, collegial relationship, student relationship, etc.). During the thematic analysis process, I used memo writing for reflexivity and reflection.

Positionality

I am in my 19th year of public education and in my sixth year of teaching at the same school. Previously, I taught at a school for ten years and at times thought I would stay there for my entire career. I am a mid-career teacher and fit the criteria for my study. Additionally, I identify as a white, middle-aged, straight, married, upper-middle-class female, which are common

characteristics of many teachers. Being aware that I meet the inclusion criteria for my study, I consistently needed to be reflexive in my questioning, analysis, and writing to minimize the implications of projecting my experience on others. At times during the interviews, I found myself connecting to participants on a personal level as they described the joys, challenges, and nuances of their jobs and work environment. I enjoyed hearing about the experiences and perspectives of fellow mid-career teachers. Engaging with these participants positively impacted my professional life as I reflected on their lived experiences and refined some of my daily practices within my teaching job. However, I was consistently aware of, and grounded myself in, my strong conviction that the purpose of this study was to learn about others' perspectives and experiences and not to share my own.

Ethical Considerations

As a mid-career public school teacher pursuing a Ph.D. in School Leadership, I am highly interested in this study and its results. The risks associated with participating in this study were minimal as participation was fully voluntary, and no identifiable information will be shared. Participants could end the interview at any time and ask for their data to be destroyed and not to be included in the study. There was no physical risk and minimal psychological, economic, and social risks. Interviews appeared to be positive experiences for participants based on their feedback and engagement.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

Due to the explanatory sequential methods used in this study, quantitative and qualitative results will be presented separately in this chapter.

Quantitative results

Within the inclusion criteria determined for this study, 9,064 responses from the 2024 Teaching and Learning Conditions Colorado (TLCC) survey were analyzed. They included responses from teachers planning on staying at their school (stayers) and teachers who plan to remain in the profession but not at the same school (movers). Analysis of responses from those who plan to leave the profession (leavers) was minimal but will be mentioned in the discussion chapter under further research.

Descriptive Statistics

Since the analysis focused on three specific questions from the 2024 TLCC survey, descriptive statistics for each question are shared. These statistics represent the survey responses for the teachers who met the inclusion criteria for this study. They have not been condensed or modified.

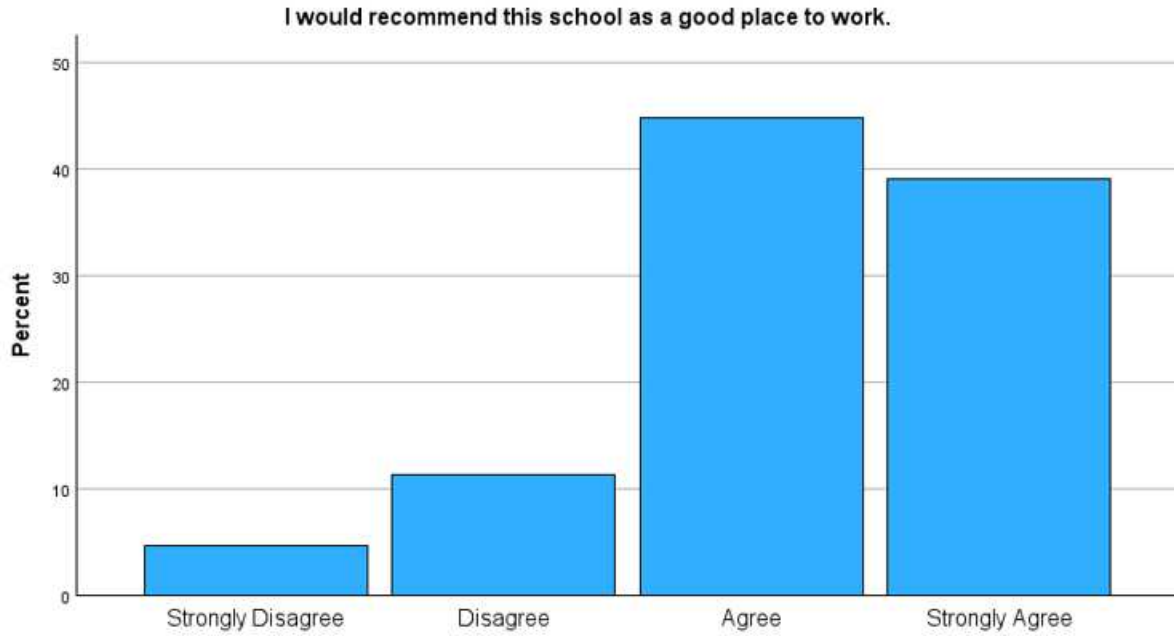


Figure 3

TLCC Question T 10-1a: "I would recommend this school as a good place to work."

Of the 8,410 responses to the question about recommending their school as a good place to work, 7,057 participants, or 84%, either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "I would recommend this school as a good place to work," as shown in Figure 3.

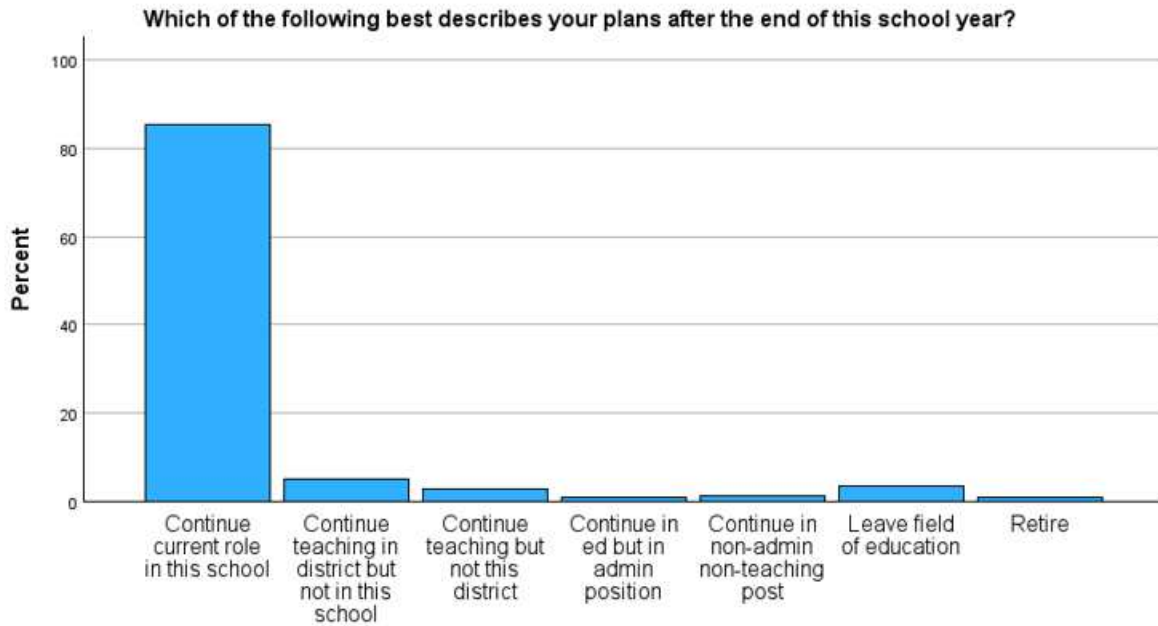


Figure 4

TLCC Question T 10-2: “Which of the following best describes your plans after the end of this school year?”

Of the people who responded to this question (N=8,833), 86% plan to return to the same school, 8% plan to continue teaching but not at the same school (either within or outside of the same district), and 7% plan to leave teaching (continue in an administration position, continue in non-administration, non-teaching position, leave the field of education or retire) as shown in Figure 4.

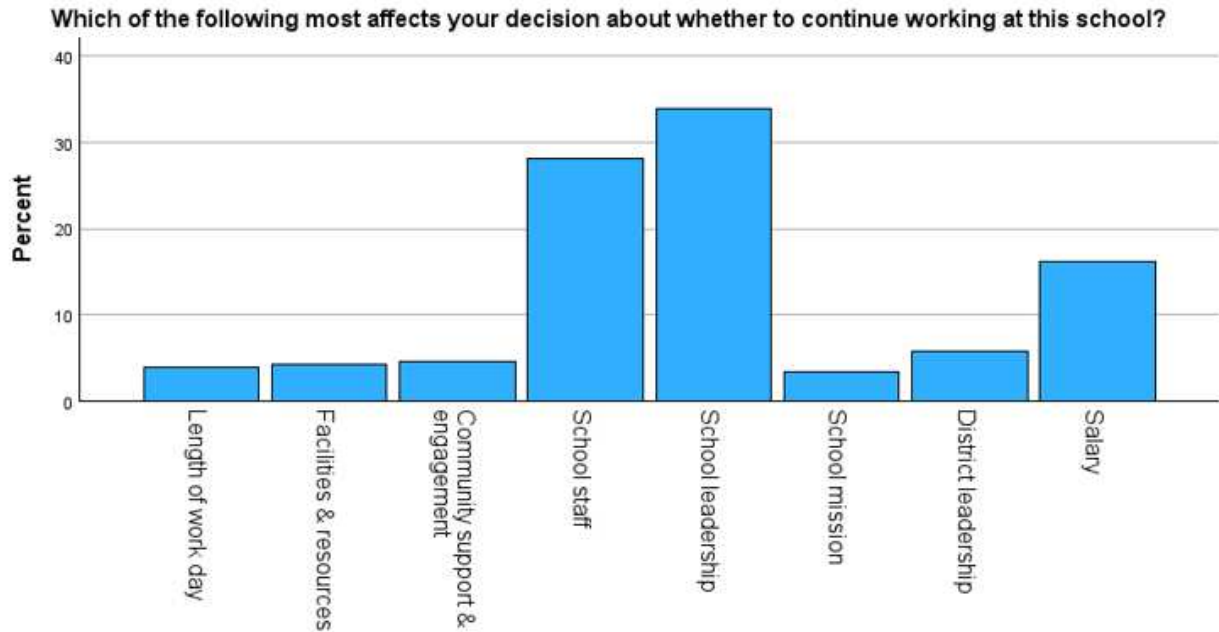


Figure 5

TLCC Question T10-3: “Which of the following most affects your decision about whether to continue teaching at this school?”

When asked about what most affects their decision to continue teaching at their school, those teachers with 11-20 years of experience who responded to this question chose school leadership (34%) and school staff (28%) as the most common factors (N=8,802). Figure 5 shows the distribution of responses. One important consideration is that the TLCC survey does not delineate who is included in school staff. With school leadership as an alternative option, one may conclude that school leadership is excluded from the school staff. However, the survey does not explicitly state who is included in school staff and, as such, is left to participants’ interpretation.

Research Questions

RQ: What are the differences and commonalities between stayers and movers when answering questions about whether their school is a good place to work and what most impacts their decision for the following school year?

When answering questions related to their school being a good place to work, stayers and movers had significantly different responses. However, their answers were similar when stating what most impacted their decision for the following year.

RQ1a: Is there a relationship between a teacher's perception of their school being a good place to work and their plans after the end of the school year? If there is a relationship, is there a difference between teachers who plan to continue teaching at the school and those who plan to continue teaching at a different school?

A Pearson Chi-Square test of independence was run to examine the relationship between a teacher recommending their school as a good place to work and their plans for next year (stayers, movers, and leavers) $X^2 (2, N=8365) = 1662.44, p < .001$. This indicates that the null hypothesis of these two questions not being related is refuted, and the relationship between these two variables is significant. Ninety percent of stayers would recommend their school as a good place to work, whereas 34% of movers would recommend it as a good place to work, as shown in Table 6. This indicates that if a teacher does not recommend their school as a good place to work, they are significantly more likely to either move schools or leave the profession altogether. Surprisingly, 61% of leavers recommend their school as a good place to work, but that will be discussed more in the next chapter. These findings indicate that recommending a school as a good place to work can be a critical indicator of a teacher's intentions for the following school

year. When teachers are satisfied with their work environment, they are likely to return for the following school year.

Table 6

Crosstabulation of Recommending a School as a Good Place to Work and Plans for Next Year

			Stayers	Movers	Leavers	Total
I would recommend this school as a good place to work	No	Count	695	429	210	1334
		Percent of Stayers, Movers, and Leavers	9.7%	66.5%	39.5%	15.9%
	Yes	Count	6494	216	321	7031
		Percent of Stayers, Movers, and Leavers	90.3%	33.5%	60.5%	84.1%
	Total	Count	7189	645	531	8365
		Percent of Stayers, Movers, and Leavers	100%	100%	100%	100%

The data were re-coded as dichotomous variables for both questions, recommending a school as a good place to work and planning to return to the same school, and a Pearson correlation coefficient was run: $r(8408) = .42$, $r^2 = .18$, $p < .001$. This means that there is a strong correlation between these two variables, and rating a school as a good place to work has a medium to large effect size on a teacher's plans for the following school year.

RQ1b: Is there a relationship between a teacher recommending their school as a good place to work and what most affects their decision to continue teaching at a school?

School leadership is the most impactful factor when deciding whether to return to the same school for the following year. Thirty-two percent of teachers who would recommend their school as a good place to work reported that school leadership was the most impactful in their

decision to continue working at the same school and 43% of those who do not recommend their school as a good place to work stated that school leadership was the most impactful factor. A Pearson Chi-Square test of independence was run to examine the relationship between recommending your school as a good place to work and what most affects a teacher's decision about whether to continue working at the same school $X^2(7, N=8332) = 178.05, p < .001$. This indicates that the null hypothesis of these two questions not being related is refuted, and the relationship between these two variables is significant. School leadership played a pivotal role when teachers were deciding if they would recommend their school as a good place to work, regardless of their intention to return to the school for the following year.

School staff also had a profound impact on both groups of teachers. Those who would recommend their school as a good place to work identified school staff as the most important factor 31% of the time, which is almost as often as they chose school leadership. However, school staff was identified less frequently as the most important factor by those who would not recommend their school as a good place to work; they only selected school staff as the most important factor 16% of the time, which was the third most common choice.

As shown in Table 7, the lowest five factors were the same regardless of a teacher's perception of their school being a good place to work: length of workday, facilities & resources, community support & engagement, school mission, and district leadership. While each factor may contribute to a teacher recommending a school as a good place to work, they are not the most important. For those who do not recommend their school as a good place to work, salary was identified as the most important factor 18% of the time, which was the second most common selection behind school leadership.

Table 7

Crosstabulation of Recommending a School as a Good Place to Work and What Most Affects Your Decision to Continue Working at a School

	I would recommend this school as a good place to work				
		No	Yes	Total	
Which of the following most affects your decision about whether to continue working at this school?	Length of workday	Count	50	269	319
		Percent within "I would recommend this school as a good place to work"	3.7%	3.8%	3.8%
	Facilities & resources	Count	53	280	333
		Percent within "I would recommend this school as a good place to work"	3.9%	4.0%	4.0%
	Community support & engagement	Count	54	320	374
		Percent within "I would recommend this school as a good place to work"	4.0%	4.6%	4.5%
	School staff	Count	220	2145	2365
		Percent within "I would recommend this school as a good place to work"	16.4%	30.7%	28.4%
	School leadership	Count	581	2252	2833
		Percent within "I would recommend this school as a good place to work"	43.3%	32.2%	34%
	School mission	Count	19	267	286
		Percent within "I would recommend this school as a good place to work"	1.4%	3.8%	3.4%
	District leadership	Count	123	354	477
		Percent within "I would recommend this school as a good place to work"	9.2%	5.1%	5.7%
	Salary	Count	242	1103	1345
		Percent within "I would recommend this school as a good place to work"	18.0%	15.8%	16.1%
	Total	Count	1342	6990	8332
		Percent within "I would recommend this school as a good place to work"	100%	100%	100%

To learn more about what school leaders “do” that causes teachers to recommend their school as a good place to work, I ran a Cronbach’s alpha for seven questions on the TLCC survey that address school leadership and teacher leadership opportunities. Cronbach’s alpha was 0.94, which indicates a high level of internal reliability. As shown in Table 8, all but one relationship between factors has a strong correlation, particularly among the first four questions that address current school leadership.

Table 8

Pearson Correlations for Questions Related to School Leadership

	Led by an effective team	Staff feel comfortable raising issues	Staff suggestions put in place	Leadership works to build trust	Professional expertise is valued	Teachers have leadership opportunities	Teachers have adequate influence
Led by an effective team	1						
Staff feel comfortable raising issues	.73	1					
Staff suggestions put in place	.80	.79	1				
Leadership works to build trust	.82	.78	.84	1			
Professional expertise is valued	.68	.65	.69	.69	1		
Teachers have leadership opportunities	.46	.52	.51	.50	.54	1	
Teachers have adequate influence	.68	.66	.75	.70	.72	.58	1

p<.001

Thirty-one percent of those who would recommend their school as a good place to work identified school staff as the most impactful factor when deciding to remain at a school, making it the second most common response behind school leadership. To learn more about what respondents were considering when choosing school staff as the most impactful factor, I chose five questions using face validity related to school staff and ran a Cronbach’s alpha. Unlike school leadership, which has a subset of questions on the TLCC survey, there are no questions specifically tied to school staff. Cronbach’s alpha on these questions was 0.8, which is acceptable. Table 9 shows Pearson Correlations for each question. Five relationships have strong correlations, while another three have moderate correlations. Not surprisingly, the lowest correlation found was between two factors addressing different priorities of the school staff.

Table 9

Pearson Correlations for Questions Related to School Staff

	Staff show respect for each other	I regularly engage with colleagues	I have opportunities to learn from others	I feel like I belong at my school	I have at least one colleague that I trust
Staff show respect for each other	1				
I regularly engage with colleagues	.55	1			
I have opportunities to learn from others	.39	.38	1		
I feel like I belong at my school	.55	.55	.42	1	
I have at least one colleague that I trust	.37	.51	.27	.53	1

p<.001

RQ1c: Is there a relationship between a teacher’s plans after the end of the school year and what most affects their decision about whether to continue teaching at a school? If there is a relationship, is there a difference between teachers who plan to continue teaching at the same school and those who plan to continue teaching at a different school?

As shown in Table 10, of the teachers who answered this question (N=8,743), school leadership, school staff, and salary were the most common answers, with school leadership being the most impactful across stayers, movers, and leavers. Of those who plan to stay at their current school for the following school year, 33% stated that school leadership most affected their decision, followed by school staff, which had 30% of responses as to what most affected their decision. Of the teachers who plan to move schools, 48% stated that school leadership most affected their decision about whether to continue working at the same school, whereas only 16% identified school staff as the most important factor. With school leadership playing such a critical role in the retention of mid-career teachers, our leaders must have insight into the values of this subgroup.

When analyzing the data to determine the relationships between recommending a school as a good place to work, plans for the following school year, and what impacted the decision to remain at a school, significant overlaps were identified. School leadership and school staff were rated as the most impactful factors for both recommending a school as a good place to work and planning to return to the same school the following year. Likewise, the relationships between not recommending a school as a good place to work and planning to move schools also aligned with teachers' perceptions of school leadership and school staff. These close alignments reiterate the importance of a teacher recommending their school as a good place to work and its impact on their plans for the following year.

Table 10

Crosstabulation of Plans for Next Year and What Most Affects Your Decision to Continue Working at a School

	Plans for next school year					Total
		Stayers	Movers	Leavers		
Which of the following most affects your decision about whether to continue working at this school?	Length of workday	Count	287	23	36	346
		Percent within "Stayers, movers and leavers"	3.8%	3.3%	6.3%	4.0%
	Facilities & resources	Count	312	29	28	369
		Percent within "Stayers, movers and leavers"	4.2%	4.2%	4.9%	4.2%
	Community support & engagement	Count	358	23	23	404
		Percent within "Stayers, movers and leavers"	4.8%	3.3%	4.0%	4.6%
	School staff	Count	2271	107	81	2459
		Percent within "Stayers, movers and leavers"	30.4%	15.5%	14.1%	28.1%
	School leadership	Count	2456	331	170	2957
		Percent within "Stayers, movers and leavers"	32.8%	47.9%	29.7%	33.8%
	School mission	Count	270	7	16	293
		Percent within "Stayers, movers and leavers"	3.6%	1.0%	2.8%	3.4%
	District leadership	Count	357	74	72	503
		Percent within "Stayers, movers and leavers"	4.8%	10.7%	12.6%	5.8%
	Salary	Count	1168	97	147	1412
		Percent within "Stayers, movers and leavers"	15.6%	14.0%	25.7%	16.2%
	Total	Count	7479	691	573	8743
		Percent within "Stayers, movers and leavers"	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

When considering which methods to use for this study, one limitation of only conducting a quantitative analysis of the TLCC data was that the survey questions do not specifically address why a teacher would recommend their school as a good place to work. This limitation reinforced the need for the explanatory sequential mixed methods design of this study. After the completion of the quantitative analysis, the interview protocol was modified to include questions about recommending a school as a good place to work, what leaders “do” to motivate teachers to remain at the school, and interactions among staff. Also, the TLCC survey question regarding what most impacts their decision to remain at their school only allows teachers to choose the most impactful factor. During the interviews, I asked participants to rank all choices on a scale of one to five stars to see if there were significant differences. Keeping in mind that this is comparing a sample of 9,000+ responses to eight responses, this question was more a curiosity than solid science. However, school leadership and school staff remained the two most important reasons and were rated significantly higher than the other factors. The insight participants offered through their interviews supported the findings of the quantitative analysis, including the connection between teacher retention and recommending a school as a good place to work, and what impacts both of those decisions.

Qualitative Results

The four qualitative research questions that drove the interviews were:

- 1) What factors impact a teacher’s decision to remain at a specific school?
- 2) What factors impact a teacher's decision to remain in the profession but switch schools?

3) What actions of school leaders positively affect a teacher's perception of school leadership?

4) What actions of school staff positively affect a teacher's perception of the work environment?

The first two questions sought to confirm the findings of the quantitative data through the lens of Mason and Matas's Four Capital Theoretical Model. The first research question found evidence that supported social, human, and structural capitals, while support for positive psychological capital was found through the second question. The quantitative analysis identified school leadership and school staff as imperative to teacher retention; however, qualitative interviews were necessary to decipher what exactly school leadership and school staff "do" that makes these two factors so critical. Therefore, research questions three and four sought to explore school leadership and school staff actions that impact retention.

The codebook developed for this study contained 31 unique codes created through both deductive and inductive approaches. Initially leaning into a deductive approach, I created 13 *a priori* codes directly correlated to the 13 themes identified by Mason and Matas. As I was coding, the need for additional codes arose. In response, 18 *in vivo* codes were developed as potential themes were identified during analysis, leaning into an inductive approach.

RQ1: What factors impact a teacher's decision to remain at a specific site?

As previously noted in the sampling section, seven of the eight teachers have been at their current teaching site for eight years or longer, indicating this group has relevant insight into this specific question. Interview questions addressing this research question prompted teachers to think about a school where they enjoyed working and share what they liked about it. Other

questions specifically addressed the role of school leadership and interactions among the staff when recalling a positive work environment. Evidence for themes within the social, human, and structural capitals was found in response to question one.

Social Capital

Pervasive evidence supporting Mason and Matas's social capital theory was identified throughout this collection of interviews. Participants spoke at length about the five themes found within this theory: 1) quality of relationships with members of the school community, 2) presence and quality of leadership, 3) school culture, 4) presence, quality, and nature of informal and formal support, and 5) value of teachers and teaching. Since school leadership, school culture, and school staff will be discussed in depth in the results for research questions three and four, most of the analysis presented here will focus on relationships (theme one) and value (theme five).

Relationships permeated almost every facet of the factors that impact teacher retention and were significantly interwoven across many responses, regardless of participant or topic. While code co-occurrence was common, the code for relationships coexisted the most often, highlighting how often respondents were thinking of the people associated with the roles within the school and not just the positions themselves. While different participants placed a higher emphasis on relationships with various members of the school community, relationships with colleagues and students were frequently highlighted. Each participant discussed the importance of their relationships with colleagues, and seven participants highlighted the significance of their relationships with students. Half of the respondents shared the importance of their relationships with families, the larger school community, and/or the administration. As such, I argue that

relationships are the foundation for a teacher's perception of a school's leadership, culture, and community.

Most teachers talked at length about the impact relationships with students had on their satisfaction with the teaching profession. Emily, a middle school English teacher, stated, "I love connecting with that age group. ...over the years, I've just gotten so much reward from that relationship." Becky shared that in her job as a college prep advisor, she was able to build long-lasting relationships with students and families and celebrate accomplishments alongside them. As a middle school counselor, she continued to develop meaningful relationships with students. When asked what she loved about being a school counselor, she responded:

The relationships that I get to build and the different ways that happens. A lot of times, for us counselors, we get to see the kid at some of their most vulnerable. And a lot of times when I'm with kids, it's just me and them in my office, so they're not trying to show out or act a certain type of way to impress friends and classmates and peers. So, I think I get to sometimes see them at their truest...I just love that.

Heather expressed the personal joy she experiences as a teacher, along with the priority she places on knowing her students as people. She stated, "Building relationships with kids and finding out what makes them glimmer makes my heart glimmer." These quotes exemplify how deeply these teachers care about students and the relationships they share with them.

Relationships with families were also important to some of the participants. Donna recalled her previous experience working at a high-poverty school. The relationships and trust families had with the school were a large part of the reason she reflected positively on her time there. She stated

It was a great school...I loved working there because of the diversity, and the families just trusted you. And that's huge; even though they had a lot of struggles at home, they trusted that we were doing our best at school and really trying to help their kiddos. I just think that is huge.

Heather discussed the important role of the families at her school when they recently came together to advocate for all of the great things that happen at her school. She shared that one of the greatest gifts of the process was learning more about what the parents valued about their school and community. She has worked at the same school for the past 14 years and deeply values the trust that families impart to her. As students and families significantly impact a school community, relationships with both groups were influential in a teacher's decision to remain at a specific site.

As pertinent to the fifth theme of the value of teachers and teaching, four participants expressed gratitude for their local education unions and the larger community. Two participants shared their appreciation for their local unions, which had successfully advocated for pay increases. Two communities recently passed a mill levy or bond to increase funding for public schools, which the teachers acknowledged and appreciated. Teachers within these communities shared that they felt valued when their community was willing to invest in them. In addition to feeling valued and supported by the community, teachers also touched on the importance of feeling valued by administrators, albeit with negative examples. Heather painstakingly shared that her school has lost "tremendous talent" and "incredible people and educators" because they did not feel valued by leadership. Catherine shared a similar sentiment when she discussed leaving a previous school because she did not feel valued by her administration. When teachers feel valued within and outside of the school, they are likely to remain at that site.

Human Capital

Within the human capital theory, teachers shared insight into the importance of having the skills and knowledge to be successful at their jobs and opportunities for continued professional development. Emily stated, "As a seasoned educator, I like [admin] knowing what's going on in

my room and encouraging me...But also, I'm kind of at that point where I hope that they trust me that I'm doing a good job." This highlights that Emily feels competent in her work and hopes that leadership also recognizes her competency. Six other teachers shared similar sentiments about having the skills necessary to be successful in their jobs. Heather expanded this notion to include the skills and knowledge of her colleagues. She stated, "You could plop me in any team, and we'd find success."

All eight participants spoke about the importance of professional development, while four participants shared an iteration of loving to learn. At Gary's school, all professional development is conducted in-house, so "it's all connected to the goals and the missions that we as a staff have already agreed on." Others shared that they frequently participated in professional development offerings outside of their school to build their skills and knowledge. Heather shared that, despite being at a new grade level, she frequently uses the regulation strategies and trauma-informed practices she learned through outside professional development to help students succeed.

Six educators talked about professional development through the lens of collaboration. Not only do teachers want opportunities to learn more, but they also want to be able to share their knowledge with others. Donna shared

I would love to continue to grow and learn as a teacher and get better...Usually, we want to learn more. We want to do more, but it'd be nice sometimes to feel validated and be able to share expertise in some way.

Emily talked about how appreciative she was of a new teammate who had helped her view the curriculum in a new light. Three educators shared experiences of taking part in professional development as a tool for moving their careers forward. Becky highlighted that she might like to move into a district-level position supporting counselors or become a trainer of trainers for restorative practices, while Anne is currently working towards obtaining her administration

license. A few teachers also mentioned participating in frequent professional development early in their careers as a tool for increasing their salary while also developing their skills for succeeding as teachers. Continuous learning opportunities and the potential for professional growth play a positive role in retaining teachers at a specific site.

Structural Capital

While multiple facets of structural capital were mentioned during interviews, two subthemes within the employment conditions, structures, and pathways theme were the most prevalent. The first subtheme related to salary was specific to retention at the same site or at least in the same district. Seven teachers mentioned the impact of salary on their decision to remain at a specific site. When asked about what would cause him to leave his school, Gary stated,

One of the things that happens is you get the golden handcuffs on in a certain district where you can't move your years. [If my school closed], I'd have to decide if there's somewhere else in [my district] that would be better, but in some ways, I'm kind of ruined. You know, I've worked in these little cool schools for so long that I'm not sure I could step into a 2,000-person high school and be happy.

This concern was reiterated by other participants who shared that switching careers or districts would be nearly unfathomable. One participant mentioned having a single income, and another shared that she is the primary income earner for her family, which significantly impacted their perception of being able to switch professions or districts. Others shared that they have worked diligently to move across the salary scale, often through professional development trainings offered by their districts. If a teacher switched districts, they could potentially lose credit for some of their years of service and a portion of their professional development credits acquired through district professional development trainings. The fear of taking a significant pay cut by switching districts has eliminated these teachers' interest in working in a different district. While

a few teachers shared that they have previously switched schools in their district or plan to in the future, none considered switching districts to remain in the profession.

The other subtheme of employment conditions related to structural capital that was prevalent in many interviews is the impact of having a family on their career. Half of the teachers shared that teaching is a good career for someone with a family, especially those with school-aged children. Anne shared

It's been a great job for our family. It's a job where I can work and be fulfilled... and feel like I'm helping children and doing a good job, but also, I can be present for my family too...My kids go to the middle and high school across the parking lot, so it's logistically a good place for me to be working right now, and that definitely does factor into why I've stayed at this school.

Of the four participants who mentioned their children, all have children who will attend their school, currently attend their school, or previously attended the school where they work. They discussed the additional value of having a dual role of both parent and teacher within the school community and how they enjoyed being at the same school or feeder system as their children.

When Donna was asked why she stayed at her school despite having negative experiences with her administration, she stated,

To be truthful, my children are there. I have a third and a fifth grader. So, currently, I am there for at least two more years. And then I plan to stay in the district. However, I will probably be looking for other schools.

Not only do these teachers and moms enjoy seeing their children while at work, but the school schedule also works well for their families. On one hand, only half of the interview participants spoke about this topic; however, those who did discuss their family shared at length about the intersection of being a teacher and having school-age children, and the impact their family had on their chosen profession.

RQ2: What factors impact a teacher’s decision to remain in the profession but switch schools?

Altogether, the eight teachers interviewed have taught at 26 schools. One has never switched schools, one has taught at two schools, three have worked at three schools, and the other three have worked at between four and six schools throughout their careers. Most, but not all, switched schools earlier in their careers when their personal lives were less rooted. For some, their twenties were a time of adventure, travel, and starting families. When asked about their career journey, participants shared a variety of reasons why they had left a previous school.

Figure 6 shows how responses were categorized.

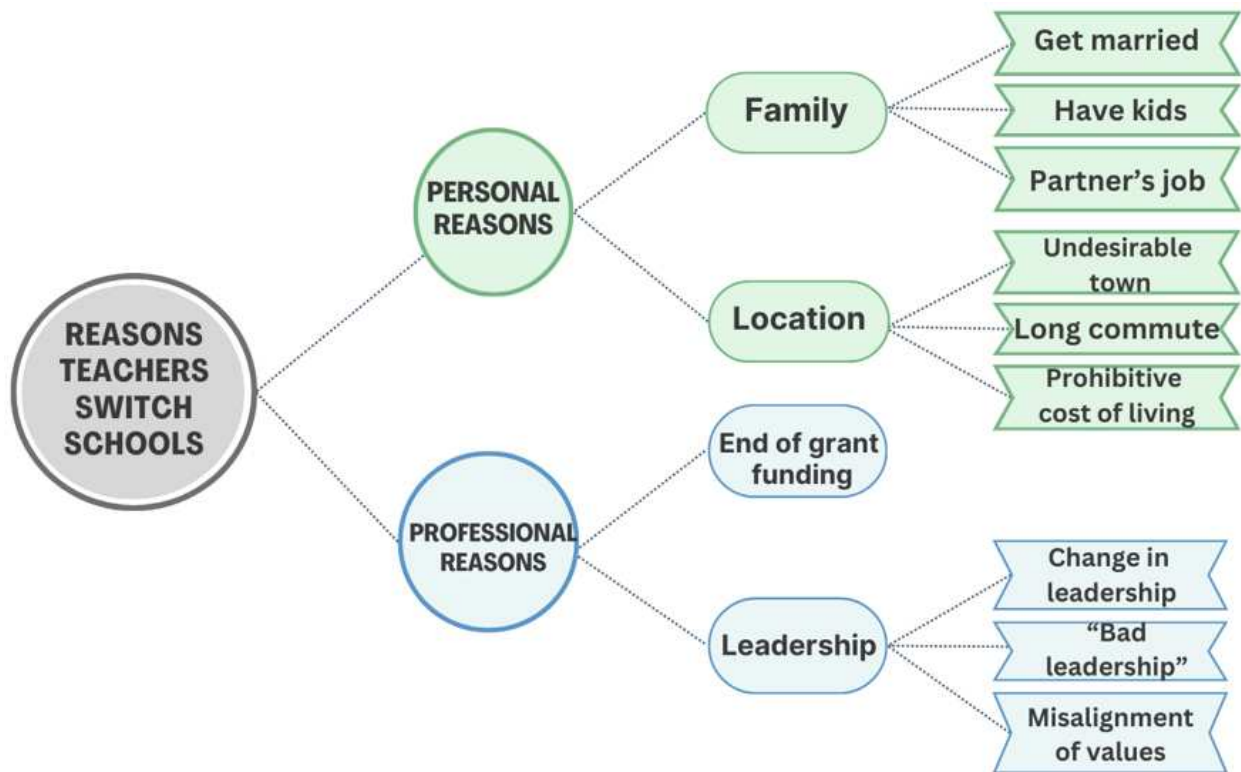


Figure 6

Reasons Teachers Switch Schools

Of the seven teachers who have switched schools, five had done so at least once due to family reasons. Four had switched for professional reasons; two switched due to a grant ending that had funded their position. Only two participants had switched schools due to leadership. No one cited school staff as a reason for switching schools, although Emily shared that she had recently looked at switching schools due to a few close colleagues leaving and being displeased with one of her remaining teammates. Catherine shared her experience of switching schools due to a change in leadership.

I thought I was going to work at my first school forever. I was really, really happy there, and then we had an administration change, and I didn't feel valued. I didn't feel like I was contributing or making a difference in any way. When we moved the kids to a digital curriculum that I just supervised, I felt like there was no point in me being here, but I didn't feel like that meant I was a bad teacher or I shouldn't teach. Just they don't need me here.... I really love what I do, and I wasn't shy about leaving when it didn't work for me. It made more sense to me to leave and find something that made me feel happy... if it's not working, let's go find a school where it does.

This quote encompasses many critical aspects of teacher retention, including the evolution of teachers during their careers, the importance of feeling valued, and the impact leadership has on teacher retention. While personal factors will always have an inevitable impact on retention, school leadership can actively strategize how to retain high-quality teachers.

Positive Psychological Capital

In Mason and Matas's theoretical framework, this theory only contains one theme: personality and psychological factors. Despite this, the rationale of "the inclusion of PsyCap [psychological capital] factors in the teacher attrition theoretical model developed is important because it acknowledges the fact that variables that are internal to the teacher also play a part in their career path choices" (Mason & Matas, 2015, p. 58). Various psychological factors, including motivation, satisfaction, and commitment, were included as subthemes in their model.

When Anne was describing her return to teaching after staying home for a few years when her children were young she stated, “When I came back, I realized that my brain missed what teaching *is* and I felt like, ‘Oh, I really do want to be doing this long term’...It's all the decisions and all the fast pace and being creative.” The notion of what teaching “is” provides some insight into how difficult it is to clearly identify and explain the vastness of teaching and everything it encompasses. It is a unique profession. Gary expanded upon this thought when he described teaching as “a really weird job” to explain to someone, despite feeling like it is a really good career. While difficult to pinpoint, some personal characteristics that were mentioned or alluded to seemed to resonate across interviews; people talked about having an adventurous spirit, the satisfaction of solving problems, feeling successful, and the joy they get from teaching.

In my literature review, I noted the need for further research on the impact of love on a teacher’s decision to remain in the field. The findings of this study support the inclusion of love and altruism under the positive psychological capital heading. Love, particularly a love of teaching and learning, along with a love of working with students and families, was a prominent theme throughout the interviews. One interview question specifically asked, “What about teaching do you love?” prompting the use of this language, yet participants used the word “love” 62 times while talking about their careers, with the lowest frequency being three times and the highest frequency occurring 13 times in two separate interviews. Quotes containing the word “love” were common across all interviews and included sentiments of loving working with students, teaching the whole child, and loving what they “do.” While individually, the quotes were not profound, together they offer a glimpse of the deep love that the participants have for this profession.

Collectively, this passionate group of educators cares deeply about their profession and is dedicated to being public school teachers. During the interviews, I often asked follow-up questions to pinpoint what exactly it is about teaching that teachers love. For some, it is the relationship with students, families, and their school communities. Heather shared that she values teaching at a school with an engaged community of students and families, along with collaborating with colleagues who are invested in learning more. Catherine shared that she loves when students find success, particularly after a struggle:

I love that moment when a kid is doing a problem wrong over and over and over again, and then I get to watch them figure out what it is they're doing. And then suddenly they can do it, and they're super successful. That moment when you see kids get something... It's very rewarding.

Altruism was also noted in the literature review as a reason people enter the public teaching profession. Anne and Gary spoke about viewing their work as a public service and an opportunity to give back. They also described their job as providing a sense of purpose. Others talked about altruism on the student level and the impact teachers have on students' lives. Whether it is an elementary integrated services student securing foundational skills, a middle schooler discovering their true self, or a high school graduate, many participants spoke at length about the joy they personally experienced knowing that they played an integral role in a student's success. Empowering students to achieve is altruistic, as student growth remains the primary focus of the student-educator relationship.

RQ3: What actions of school leaders positively affect a teacher's perception of school leadership?

After analyzing responses and excerpts related to school leadership, I identified five actions of school leaders that significantly impact a teacher's perception of school leadership.

They are: 1) being present and involved, 2) trusting teachers and earning trust in return, 3) aligning with teachers' values, 4) setting the tone for the school's climate and culture, and 5) providing support.

School leaders who are present and engaged positively impact a teacher's perception of building leadership. Six participants spoke at length about the importance of school leaders being actively involved with teachers and the school community. When asked what school leaders did to motivate teachers to stay at their site, Gary responded, "They are in touch with teacher needs and how things are going for teachers. They have their finger on the emotional pulse of the building." This sentiment was echoed by other participants when they talked about leaders who celebrated with staff, understood the nuances of different roles within the school, and grounded themselves in teachers' experiences. By being present and engaged within the school, leaders can see, support, and connect with teachers in meaningful ways that increase a teacher's perception of school leadership.

The second action teachers identified as important was that school leaders extend trust to teachers while also earning trust in return. Study participants repeatedly stated that having an administration that trusted their professional judgment to make good decisions for their classroom was critical for teacher retention. Within this theme, teachers discussed the importance of autonomy, which can only be present if school leadership allows teachers to participate in making meaningful decisions that impact their day-to-day experiences. When specifically speaking about mid-career teachers, Frances stated, "What teachers at that point really need is flexibility. And trust. The belief that you know teachers can make good decisions about their classrooms and have a say in what is going on." Other teachers echoed this sentiment. In addition to wanting to feel trusted in their classroom, they appreciate opportunities to design curricula and

participate in building-level decisions. Becky shared that when her administrators trusted the staff to do their jobs and be professional, it led to a positive climate and culture. Teachers also shared the importance of trust going both ways; not only do they need to feel trusted by school leadership, but they also need to be able to trust their leaders in return.

The third action of school leaders that positively impacts teachers was when teachers and administration share values about students, teaching, and education. Half of the teachers spoke about the importance of having a leader who shares a similar vision or educational philosophy that they embrace. When discussing her current administrator, Catherine shared, “[She] has the same attitude towards kids...I think it'd be hard to work for somebody that had a different belief about what school should be...they have to believe the same thing about kids and parents and support you.” An alignment of values decreases tension between leaders and teachers and allows for a more relaxed atmosphere. Additionally, teachers are more likely to feel supported if they value the same things as leaders.

Setting the tone for the building’s climate and culture was one of the most important responsibilities of school leaders. As Emily stated,

Leadership makes a really huge difference. I think it can really make or break the culture of your school and your work-life quality...very often, it rests on the shoulders of the principal because then it trickles down to everyone else.

When school leaders foster a culture of exploration, teachers feel more empowered to take risks and seek guidance from administrators and colleagues alike. Heather stated that her school is “an incredible place to use your voice and to make mistakes and to try new things and take risks.” Many teachers spoke fondly about being able to go to school leadership with questions because their leaders have intentionally created cultures where questions are welcomed, and curiosity is encouraged. Opportunities to brainstorm with colleagues about how to best support students

were also very important to teachers. When leaders facilitate a positive school culture that embraces a culture of exploration and collaboration, teachers thrive.

Finally, when educators feel supported by school leaders, they want to continue working for the administration. Catherine went so far as to say she would follow her administrator if she left to go to another school. Becky appreciated that the principal at her school offers “shoutouts” at staff meetings to celebrate teachers for what they are doing “really well.” Anne stated that her current administration regularly highlights the difference that teachers are making, which motivates her to continue teaching because she has not experienced that recognition in any other job. While teachers generally appreciated support and accolades from the administration, they also spoke about the value of their administrator’s support when things were difficult.

Of particular concern for four participants was the level of support administrators provided when working with parents; some iteration of the phrase “have my back” was shared by each. For these teachers, having an administrator who would support them through or relieve them of interactions with elevated parents was crucial to feeling supported. This notion highlighted some of the job-related stress that teachers feel, particularly when their administration is more removed and less engaged with families. Catherine expanded on this feeling when she shared that in her experience, interactions with parents have dramatically changed during her 18-year tenure, as some parents today will respond with aggressive emails anytime their students feel any discomfort or failure. She deeply appreciated

having an administrator who is willing to take those emails from us. We don't ever have to respond to them. I can just send them to her, and she will deal with it. She will have those conversations. She will absolutely have our back.

Other acknowledgments of feeling supported occurred when administrators arranged for relevant professional development, mediated conflicts with colleagues, and took an interest in

supporting teachers in their personal lives. Donna highlighted this last sentiment when she said, “When they are supportive of your thoughts and ideas, that doesn't mean they always go along with it. But they're supportive of you as a person. They know you as a person, not just your job” in response to the question about what school leaders “do” that motivates teachers to stay at a school.

RQ4: What actions of school staff positively affect a teacher’s perception of the work environment?

School staff plays a critical role in a teacher’s perception of a positive work environment. From the interviews, I identified five qualities and/or actions of school staff as being particularly relevant. They are: 1) being friendly and welcoming, 2) sharing values, 3) providing support, 4) embracing a culture of exploration and collaboration, and 5) having strong teams.

The first central tenet of a positive work environment was very simple: Teachers want to work with friendly people. Whether this occurs through shared laughter, going to lunch together on workdays, or greeting colleagues in the hallway, teachers want to feel welcomed and liked by the people with whom they work. Gary stated:

Everybody's just super friendly and very professional. It's not like I'm best friends with everybody on the staff, and not everyone's best friends with me. But I think we're all just generally nice to each other...I think, generally, we just like each other.

This sentiment was echoed by Becky, Donna, Emily, and Heather. All spoke about the importance of working with people who are friendly and welcoming. These actions were related to feeling seen and accepted for who they are as people. When positive, friendly, collegial relationships are the norm across the building, teachers view their school climate and culture positively and want to continue teaching at that site.

Another relevant characteristic of school staff was the alignment of values shared by staff. In some cases, teachers wanted colleagues with whom they could commiserate or who had aligned social values. Of specific importance was a shared belief in collective efficacy. While leadership played a role in setting expectations around collective efficacy, the staff embracing and acting upon this belief was important. Anne shared,

The staff is one of the most positive and focused on the collective goal...It feels like people love their jobs, love kids, and are willing to reflect, change, and grow as a collective group working towards bettering ourselves in our craft and for the outcomes that students have.

Other shared values included being solution-oriented, being inclusive, and caring about students. Heather stated that the staff at her school “is incredibly inclusive, solution-focused, and kid-driven,” which aligns with her values, while Emily simply wants to work with colleagues who care about students.

Like school leaders, the actions of individual staff members as well as the collective staff are imperative to a teacher’s perception of their workplace. Feeling supported and offering support are paramount to having a positive perception of the school staff. Seven participants spoke specifically about how teachers provide support for one another. While many people shared this sentiment, Becky stated:

I think some of it is just that sense of belonging and connection. You know, the camaraderie piece of it. You have somebody to lean on in the really tough moments. Working in education is not easy, but it's easier when you know you're not on that boat alone.

Gary, Emily, and Frances talked more generally about how the staff at their schools covered for one another when needed. Gary described it as “seeing one another’s humanity” and the impact that offering support to one another has on their overall school climate and culture. When the expectation is that you can rely on a colleague for help and support, people speak positively of

their work environment. Emily referred to a teaching partner as a “lifeline” when describing how her teammate frequently offers personal support. At Catherine’s school, the support of her colleagues is critical for both her instruction and mental health. She states,

You can talk to people about your lessons and share the workload. I love in my building that the math teachers will share all of their plans and all of their documents. We still all do our own thing. No two teachers do the same thing, even with the same grade and the same content. But we all know what everybody's doing, so if there's a day where I need a resource or I want to look at theirs, I can. I have that support built in without having to be identical. I can talk to them about kids... Sometimes, I go into lunch, and I just need to vent for a few minutes about how hard that class was. And then I feel better because they get it.

A culture of exploration that invokes collaboration was another critical action of the school staff. Donna described interactions with a colleague in which they can have hard, respectful conversations where they can challenge one another’s thinking and offer suggestions because of the relationship that exists between them:

If she questions something that I'm saying or doing...I don't feel like she's attacking me. I feel like she's really asking why I'm doing it...Or sometimes it's, ‘Here's another option that you could attempt,’ and then it takes the other person saying, ‘Well, let me try it and see what works.’

By operating from a curious state rather than a defensive state, colleagues at Donna’s school push one another to expand their thinking.

Frances discussed the importance of collaboration with classroom teachers, specifically in the context of her role as an Integrated Services teacher: “All the staff, they are planning together, they are helping, they're being consistent with expectations of students’ behavior. And they always collaborate. If you need something, there's always someone willing to help and step in.” When her school got a new curriculum this year, she stated, “I wanted access to all classes so I can help pull the kids out and help with the grading.... And they allow me to do that.” By

collaborating with colleagues, Frances positively impacts student success and reports that she enjoys working at her school, in large part due to the collaboration with her colleagues.

Others also spoke about the importance of collaboration in the context of professional development. Anne stated, “I really want to collaborate with people on work and try new things, so when I can find people who want to do that with me, that is one of the reasons I stay.” While Anne spoke about a few select colleagues, Gary appreciates that his school embraces a culture of exploration.

The school also has a sense of experimentation. It's like, ‘Hey, here's the thing we see. What could we do to address that? What could we do to do this better?’ and people are like, ‘OK, let's try it.’ And sometimes it works, and sometimes it doesn't. And sometimes we build on that. And so, it's just been 18 years of getting to experiment and play and feel like I'm a part of a community. I think the school has a strong community feel and a sense that we're in it together.

This sense of community and exploration significantly impacted Gary’s perception of the staff that he has worked alongside and has positively impacted his decision to remain at the same school for the past 18 years.

The final factor of a positive work environment was the existence of strong teams, specifically strong relationships among colleagues. When teachers are part of collaborative teams, they report feeling positively about the staff at their school. Donna referred to feeling like her team was a “family” because they were able to rely on one another. When Frances was asked what she would consider when recommending her school as a good place to work, she stated that, in addition to strong administration, the teams she works closely with are very important. Since Anne supports all students at the elementary level and does not have a direct team with whom she works, she stated that she needs a few key people across the school with whom she has strong relationships to want to stay at a school. While teams meant different things to the

participants, most spoke with reverence for the relationships they have with their teammates or a few select colleagues.

Teachers across all content areas and levels of teaching want to feel supported by their colleagues in a friendly, agreeable environment. They also value colleagues who are interested in collaboration, sharing the workload, and brainstorming solutions within a culture of exploration. When these conditions co-exist and teachers have strong relationships with colleagues, teachers are likely to describe their work environment as positive.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

Teacher retention is a critical issue impacting public schools everywhere. We need knowledgeable, experienced teachers in our schools and classrooms. As such, learning what impacts their career decisions is fundamental to increasing the retention of mid-career teachers. To this end, this study was undertaken to examine factors that increase teacher retention and to add to the body of research aimed at improving teacher retention, specifically for mid-career teachers. Existing research indicates that school leadership, school culture, and relationships impact teacher retention ((Johnson et al., 2012; Seidel et al., 2022; Tran et al., 2023; Waddell, 2010). Due to the explanatory mixed-methods design of this study, different research questions drove the quantitative and qualitative stages.

The quantitative analysis focused on three questions from the TLCC survey and explored the relationship between a teacher's perception of their school as a good place to work and their plans for the following year, along with what factors most impacted their decision to remain at a site. Survey data from the 2024 Teaching and Learning Conditions Colorado (TLCC) were analyzed to answer the following question: What are the differences and commonalities between stayers and movers when answering questions about whether their school is a good place to work and what most impacts their decision for the following school year? Additional sub-questions addressed the relationships between these three questions as answered by teachers who planned to stay at their school for the following year (stayers) and teachers planning to stay in the profession but not at the same school (movers).

After the quantitative analysis was completed, research questions for the qualitative stage of the study were created. Data from eight semi-structured interviews were analyzed to identify themes for the following questions: 1) What factors impact a teacher's decision to remain at a specific school? 2) What factors impact a teacher's decision to remain in the profession but switch schools? 3) What actions of school leaders positively affect a teacher's perception of school leadership? 4) What actions of school staff positively affect a teacher's perception of the work environment?

Key Findings

The key findings from the analysis of the TLCC data further support the belief that school leadership and school staff significantly impact teacher retention, as shown in existing literature. Of the mid-career public school teachers who responded to the questions, 90% of those who would recommend their school as a good place to work planned to return to the same location for the following year. Of those planning to return, 33% indicated that school leadership was the most important factor, while 30% stated that school staff was the most important factor. Of those teachers who are planning to move schools but continue teaching, 33% would rate their school as a good place to work. When asked to identify the most important factor in their decision to switch schools, 48% said school leadership, and 16% said school staff. For both movers and stayers, school staff and school leadership were rated as the most important factors in their decision for the following school year.

Relevant findings derived from the qualitative stage supported the findings from the quantitative analysis and identified themes aligned with nine themes found in Mason and Matas's Four Capital Theoretical Framework, as shown in Figure 7.

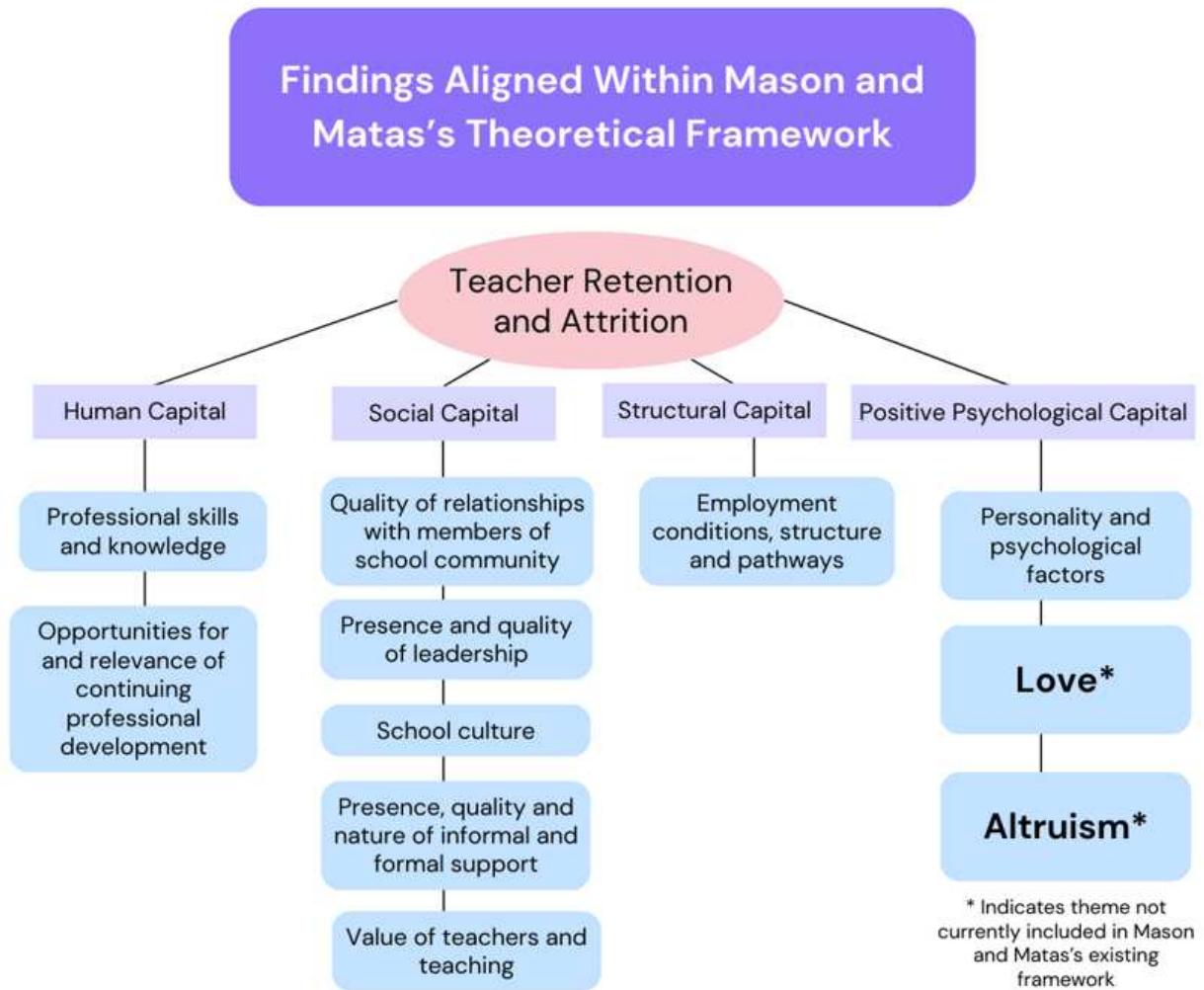


Figure 7

Themes Identified in Qualitative Analysis as Aligned with Mason and Matas's Framework

Evidence supporting the five social capital themes from this framework was found in this study. These themes include relationships within the school community, leadership, school culture, support, and the value of teachers. Themes from the human capital theory included professional skills and knowledge and relevant ongoing professional development. One theme within structural capital theory, employment conditions, structure, and pathways, was found to support teacher retention at a specific site. Subthemes within structural capital that were relevant included salary and employment conditions conducive to having a family with school-age

children. The theme from positive psychological capital, personal and psychological factors, was found to support teacher retention in the field. I argue that love and altruism are additional themes relevant to the positive psychological capital theory and included them in Figure 7.

While the first two qualitative research questions sought to further confirm the findings from the TLCC survey analysis and identify themes aligned with Mason and Matas's theoretical framework, the final two qualitative research questions sought to understand the actions of school leaders and school staff that positively impact teacher retention at a specific site. Because school leadership was most often identified as the most relevant factor in a teacher's decision to remain at a school or switch schools, as indicated by responses on the TLCC survey, investigating the actions of leaders was crucial to understanding their influence. During each interview, participants were asked to describe what school leaders "do" that motivates teachers to stay at a school. Participants identified five actions of leaders that impact their decision to remain at a school. They are: 1) being present and involved, 2) trusting teachers and earning trust in return, 3) aligning with teachers' values, 4) setting the tone for the school's climate and culture, and 5) providing support. Teachers from this study stated that when school leaders engage in these actions, they are more likely to want to remain at the same school.

School staff, regardless of whom teachers included in this identity, also significantly influenced a teacher's decision to remain at a specific site. When staff members are perceived as friendly and welcoming and share an alignment of values, teachers report positive feelings towards their school. In addition to an inclusive environment, teachers want to work where they feel supported and can provide support to colleagues. Engaging in a culture of exploration through collaboration is also crucial to many teachers' positive perception of their work environment.

Significance of Results

Understanding why a teacher would recommend a school as a good place to work is critical to teacher retention and, in turn, the success of our public schools. As shown in Sorenson and Ladd (2020), retaining teachers leads to better outcomes for student achievement.

Additionally, it decreases the financial burden associated with hiring new teachers. As shown in this study, when teachers recommended their school as a good place to work, they were more likely to return the following year and the actions of school leaders and school staff heavily impacted a teacher's decision in recommending their school as a good place to work.

The findings of this study support the belief that school leaders and school staff are foundational for teacher retention. In their previous studies, Johnson et al., Shaw and Newton, and Seidel et al. found similar results that the perception teachers have of school leadership is instrumental in forming their perception of their work environment and their desire to remain at a specific school. As shown in the analysis, the belief that a school is a good place to work significantly impacts a teacher's plans for the following school year. The TLCC survey data is similar to the MassTELLS survey data collected by Johnson et al. in their study. In both instances, school leadership and collegial relationships were the most crucial factors impacting teachers' workplace satisfaction and were rated almost equally in terms of their importance. In alignment with Waddell's 2010 findings, the qualitative analysis in this study also found strong evidence of the role relationships play in teacher satisfaction.

The qualitative stage of this study aimed to expand upon the findings of the quantitative analysis and identify themes found within Mason and Matas's theoretical framework. From teachers' lived experiences, I sought insight regarding the actions of school leaders and school staff that positively impacted teacher retention at a specific site. In alignment with the

quantitative findings, teachers stated that school leaders and school staff significantly impacted their decision to remain at a specific site.

Evidence supporting 9 of the 13 themes found in Mason and Matas's framework was also found in this study; however, limited evidence supporting the themes of pre-service education (human capital), the nature and complexity of the role (structural capital), school resources and facilities (structural capital) and departmental policies (structural capital) was identified. Considering the small qualitative sample size, the exclusion of evidence from this study has little impact on the overall value of the framework.

However, pervasive evidence for the social capital theory was prominent across this study's quantitative and qualitative findings. As schools are often considered social entities, this finding was expected. The quantitative findings that school leaders and school staff were the most often cited factors in terms of being the most important consideration for remaining at a school, signifies that the relationships between teachers, leaders and colleagues support the social capital theory and its role in teacher retention. During the qualitative analysis, the frequency of the co-occurrence of the relationship code within interviews also supported the role of social capital theory. Recognizing the significant role social capital theory plays in teacher retention can dramatically impact teacher retention.

One advancement within the framework for which I would advocate is the inclusion of love and altruism under the positive psychological capital theory. While the scope of this study is narrow, conducting further research on love and altruism or a review of current research may confirm my finding that these two themes belong within the framework. Nieto highlighted the important role that love played for teachers in her inquiry group (Nieto, 2003). Similar to Nieto's group, teachers in this study shared a love for both their students and the profession alike. The

presence of love was evident for all participants as they collectively used the term “love” 62 times when speaking about their careers during the interviews. Clearly, these passionate educators love their jobs and the work they do. Along with the love they feel, the satisfaction teachers shared when discussing students’ success was also evident. Despite the joy that teachers experience, contributing meaningfully to students’ lives is altruistic. As shared in the introduction, Bar-Tal’s (1986) definition of altruism allows space for self-satisfaction while engaging in altruistic actions. I argue that the love teachers have for teaching, learning, and positively impacting students fits in with this exception.

One finding that had not been discussed in detail in the articles I read throughout this process was the importance of the alignment of values between a teacher, their leaders, and their colleagues. Leana (2010) touched on this topic when discussing the impact on teacher retention for teachers who share norms. In interviews, half of the teachers talked about the importance of working with leaders with whom they shared values, while four participants also talked about sharing values with colleagues. Sometimes, this alignment was brought to light in connection with behavior expectations, while some teachers shared that they appreciated having colleagues with whom they could commiserate. Other times, it was addressed through the lens of collaboration and professional development. While wanting to work with others who share similar beliefs about students and the role of education seems logical, I wonder if our current political and social landscapes have exacerbated this finding. Further research into this nuance would be interesting.

An area not specifically evaluated in this study was the intersection between school leaders and school staff and their roles within school culture. Despite a lack of clarity around what constitutes a school culture, I argue that school leaders, school staff, and the relationships

between them all are critical components of school culture, which was the third most influential factor identified by Johnson et al. The rationale for the argument that school culture is heavily influenced by school leaders and school staff is that there was significant overlap between the actions of these two entities and their impact on creating a positive work environment.

Overlapping actions included aligning values, providing support, and setting the tone for and embracing a culture of exploration, which supports the argument that a school's culture rests upon the perceptions teachers have of school leaders and school staff. This nuance of entangled characteristics is reminiscent of Tran et al.'s findings of respect being the most important administrative support, in part because the teachers interviewed described respect as an overarching characteristic that encompassed other supports. Five actions of school leaders and school staff were identified as important in creating schools where teachers want to work.

An additional finding highlighted a significant deterrent that often keeps teachers from switching districts: the notion of golden handcuffs. Seven of the eight teachers interviewed mentioned the loss of salary associated with switching districts as prohibitive. While not directly connected to retirement, a concern about salary loss was present, which impacts retirement down the road. Despite potentially feeling "trapped" in their schools or districts, teachers appear to enjoy their jobs and the profession. As shown in the findings, recommending a school as a good place to work significantly impacted a teacher's plan to return for the following year, and school leaders and school staff are critical in creating spaces in which teachers would recommend their school as a good place to work.

Limitations

As with all research studies, this dissertation study is not without limitations. While the TLCC survey has many strengths, it also has some limitations. For example, teachers are only allowed to choose one option when identifying what element of school most impacts their decision to return to the same school the following year. Knowing that multiple factors impact a teacher's decision, I recommend a rank response in which teachers identify at least the top three choices that impact their decision. Furthermore, this question only addresses factors that impact your decision to return to the same school. Adding a question about factors that impact a teacher's decision to remain in the field would help provide positive insight into the "mover" population. The current choices only reflect what is happening at their current school, which may or may not be relevant to the population of teachers who are "movers"; therefore, it is hard to discern why teachers may be switching schools. With Colorado's high turnover rate, it would behoove the state to understand teachers' rationale for remaining in the profession, including those who are part of the "mover" population. Along this vein, I recommend adding response choices that address the love and altruism components of teaching as identified in this study. Another area of expansion for the TLCC survey would be including questions related to the alignment of values between colleagues and between staff and leadership. Having a deeper understanding of the interplay of how teachers' values impact where they want to teach and who they want to work for could potentially positively influence teacher retention. The final limitation identified with the TLCC survey is the ambiguity around school staff. With it being the second most influential factor across both this subset identified in this study and across all participant responses, further clarity around who the responders include in school staff is imperative. While there is a group of questions included in the professional climate section of the

survey specifically related to school leadership, questions addressing school staff are dispersed throughout the survey. Again, with teachers identifying school staff as almost as important as school leadership, clarity around who is included and what actions they are taking is critical to deepening our outside understanding of this critical component of teacher retention. A section of questions specifically related to school staff could help provide this insight.

The most glaring limitation from my perspective is that I am the only person who interacted with the participants and who partook in coding. While I was keenly aware of the possible impacts of my unintentional biases, their presence is likely found throughout the data collection, analysis, results, and discussion. Nevertheless, I was unwavering in my attempt to present the views and perspectives of the study participants. Sampling is another limitation of this study; convenience sampling was used, which significantly narrowed the scope of potential participants. Additionally, the small amount of qualitative data presents another limitation. Within this small sample size, more variation was desired, yet I was only able to interview those who volunteered and met the inclusion criteria. This sample may also not be representative of the wider mid-career teaching population; those who participated were interested in discussing what motivates them to continue teaching. Others who fit the inclusion criteria may have had significantly different career experiences and no desire to talk about why they continue teaching. Despite these limitations, this study provides insight into relevant factors that lead to retention for the mid-career teachers who participated in the Teaching and Learning Conditions Colorado survey and for the educators who participated in interviews. While these results are not generalizable, they are worthy of consideration.

Recommendations

Practical Applications

This study has many practical applications. Addressing teacher retention, specifically for the mid-career teaching population, has the potential to impact the current landscape of our public schools. Sharing the results with school leaders, districts, and policymakers can provide insight into retaining teachers, which can positively influence the student experience and financial budgets. Furthermore, sharing the results with the Colorado Department of Education can potentially impact data collection through the TLCC survey, along with policy adoption that could impact teacher retention.

One of the original goals of this study was to share low-cost/no-cost strategies with leaders and policymakers to increase teacher retention for mid-career teachers. None of the following suggestions is radical; theoretically, they can all be easily implemented. However, consideration for the highly demanding jobs our school leaders undertake while attempting to meet the needs of all students, teachers, and families must be given. If it were easy to create these work environments, they would exist. Yet retaining highly qualified, experienced teachers would significantly benefit school leaders and school communities alike. To increase teacher retention at their site, school leaders must establish and maintain a positive school culture, provide opportunities for collaboration, and create relationships where people feel valued and supported.

Establishing and maintaining a positive school culture is paramount to teacher retention. To this end, school leaders must have a realistic, informed understanding of the current staff culture in their buildings. Ideally, a shared leadership team with cross-school representation

would conduct a “deep dive” into the school’s culture from the staff perspective. If this team is not already in place, leaders can easily find resources for creating and leading highly effective teams. Analyzing data from the TLCC survey can serve as a launching point for evaluating the school’s culture. The shared leadership team should identify the current strengths and weaknesses of school leadership and school staff as conveyed through survey results. Then, they should identify the behaviors of leaders and staff that positively impacted teachers’ responses to discern which behaviors to continue or build upon. At the same time, the building leadership team needs to identify areas with lower teacher satisfaction and brainstorm what actions of leaders and staff are leading to these results. Finally, the leadership team should create an action plan that leans into their strengths and addresses areas for growth to improve the school’s culture. Once a school develops a positive school culture as perceived by school leaders and staff, all invested parties must intentionally maintain this culture. As behaviors arise that threaten to damage the school’s culture, the leaders must be willing to address and rectify them to maintain the integrity of the school’s culture and climate. Teachers, meanwhile, need to feel empowered to advocate for a positive work environment. School leaders must remain unequivocally committed to creating and maintaining a positive school culture.

The next step leaders can take to improve teacher retention is to prioritize opportunities for meaningful collaboration. Teachers want to be able to go to leaders and colleagues alike to brainstorm and collaborate. One finding of this study was that teachers value leaders who provide relevant professional development opportunities that expand everyone’s skills and knowledge through collaboration with colleagues. If administrators utilized a shared leadership team to plan professional development, it would likely align with teachers’ interests and needs. Creating schedules that allow for common planning time provides built-in opportunities for

teams to collaboratively analyze data and plan for instruction. When teams have norms and agendas for meetings, they can focus on the tasks at hand, which should positively impact student achievement and build collective efficacy.

Finally, leaders must develop and maintain relationships where teachers feel valued and supported. While districts must ensure that they hire building leaders with the emotional intelligence and relational skillsets necessary to lead a building, school leaders must commit to developing and maintaining relationships with staff. Leaders should prioritize staff wellbeing by regularly checking in with teachers to stay connected to their experiences. When leaders remain committed to being visible throughout the school and helping when needed, teachers will feel supported by their leaders. While school leaders inevitably have substantially more work to do than hours to complete it, maintaining meaningful, professional relationships with staff members can potentially alleviate some of this work for leaders.

Next steps

While conducting this study, numerous ideas for future studies emerged. While research indicates school leadership and school staff each play a significant role in teacher retention, a few other factors came to light and could be considered for future investigation. A study from the perspective of school leadership about the factors that impact teacher retention could help discern if leaders feel equipped to implement strategies to increase teacher retention. As the demands on school leaders continue to increase, determining how districts can better support the leaders in a school is paramount for creating any traction in improving teacher retention; we cannot simply add more to the plate of leaders and expect them to be able to prioritize teacher retention. Furthermore, a study investigating the hiring practices and policies of districts would shed light on whether they are hiring school leaders capable of creating and maintaining working

environments in which teachers want to remain. In the qualitative portion of this study, a participant wondered if her district was aware of the high turnover rate at her specific school, and if so, how they planned to better support the school leadership to, in turn, increase teacher retention at her site. Teachers and leaders are not silos; rather they are products of the larger system within which they work. Ensuring they have the proper skill sets and support to successfully do their jobs is critical. Additional research into school leaders and districts can provide critical insight into the necessary support they need.

Also worthy of future study is the role of aligned values in increasing teacher satisfaction. While this may not be a factor for all teachers or leaders, learning more about the nuances of value alignment and workplace satisfaction could positively impact teacher retention. Since an alignment of values was not discussed in the literature reviewed for this study, I wonder if this notion is a reflection of our current political, societal, and educational climate or if an alignment of values will continue to impact teacher retention at a specific site in the future. Furthermore, as Tran (2023) noted, how leaders supported teachers varied between urban and rural teachers, specifically in the area of clear communication. A study looking at schools with a diverse set of values compared to schools with a more homogeneous value set would be interesting and could provide further insight into this phenomenon. Additionally, more clarification around the interplay of school leaders and school staff within the context of school culture would be beneficial. Looking into factors that lead teachers to become movers instead of leavers can lead to a deeper understanding of this population, specifically when they use moving as a tool to avoid becoming a leaver.

When considering positive psychological factors, researchers could investigate the role that teachers' childhood experiences play in their decision to become teachers. Of the eight

interview participants, six mentioned either having family members in the profession or being positively impacted by teachers as students. If a study were conducted around this topic, we could glean information about potential educators and possibly develop recruitment strategies to target this population.

When TLCC survey data from “leavers” were analyzed, 61% of mid-career teachers who planned to leave the profession stated that they would recommend their school as a good place to work. This anomaly should be investigated. This group included people planning to move into district-level and administrative positions, along with those retiring. However, others in this group leave the profession for other reasons. Interviews with this subgroup could potentially shed light on how to retain these knowledgeable professionals in the classroom.

Perhaps the greatest need for future research is Colorado’s high teacher turnover rate. While inclusive of all teachers, a rate that is over double the national average is cause for investigation. Creating systems and structures that increase teacher retention is essential to Colorado public schools’ ability to thrive.

Conclusions

Retaining highly qualified, experienced, and knowledgeable mid-career teachers is critical to the success of our public schools. The support of both school leaders and school staff is paramount to teacher retention, particularly for the mid-career teachers in this study. Relationships matter greatly to teachers and permeate every facet of their jobs. When teachers have strong relationships with those in the school community, they are likely to remain at a specific school.

To increase teacher retention among mid-career teachers, we must rely on the leaders and staff within our school. Together, they hold the key to teacher satisfaction and career longevity. Positive work environments that lead a teacher to recommend a school as a good place to work are essential for them to want to return for the following school year. School leaders play a vital role in creating schools where teachers want to teach. When leaders are present and involved, trust teachers, and share values with them, teachers want to continue working alongside them. Providing support and nurturing a positive school climate are also critical responsibilities of school leadership. While leaders often have the most significant impact on a teacher's decision to remain at a school, the school staff is nearly as important. When teachers have colleagues who are friendly and welcoming, they describe their school as a positive place to work. Feeling supported by and supporting colleagues also positively impacts teacher retention. Creating and nourishing cultures of exploration within our schools allows teachers to collaborate and learn from one another. If we want our schools to thrive, positive work environments must be evident through the relationships teachers have with colleagues and school leaders. Our public school students deserve the very best. We must invest in meeting the needs of our mid-career teachers, as they possess the skills, knowledge, and passion to deliver high-quality instruction and foster effective learning environments for our students.

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Appendix A

Interview protocol

Participant name/pseudonym: _____ Date: _____ Time: _____

Thank you for participating in this interview. At any point, you are free to end the interview and ask for its transcripts to be destroyed. You can choose to have your camera on or off. I will record our interview using the record feature on MS Teams. At the conclusion of our interview, I will replace your name, along with any colleagues mentioned by name, with pseudonyms in the transcription. If you would like, I will send you the transcription to review for accuracy. Would you like to receive a copy of the transcription?

I'd like to ask you a few questions about your career and your motivation to stay in teaching as a public school teacher.

1. Tell me a little about your teaching career—when/where did you start, how many schools have you taught at, grades/subjects you have taught, etc.
2. Why did you first want to be a teacher?
3. What about teaching do you love?
4. Think about a school that you really enjoyed working at.
 - a. How long were you/have you been at this school?
 - b. What about it did you/do you like?
 - c. If you have left, what caused you to leave? **OR**
If you are still at that school, what would cause you to leave?
5. What do you consider when recommending a school as a good place to work?
6. One of the questions on the TLCC survey is, “Which of the following most affects your decision about whether to continue working at this school?”, and respondents can only

select one of eight options. To get a clearer picture of the importance of each factor, I will ask you to rate each factor on a scale of one to five, with one being not at all important and five being very important in impacting your decision to continue working at a school. I'll record your response on this Google form (<https://forms.gle/jtho8Dr7joB3qrs77>). I will then ask you to tell me a little bit about how a few of the options impact your decision to stay in teaching, both at your current location and in the profession in general.

7. On the 2024 TLCC survey, school leadership was rated as the most impactful for deciding to continue working at a school.
 - a. What do school leaders “do” that motivates teachers to stay at a school?
 - b. What do school leaders “do” that encourages teachers to switch schools but remain in the profession?
8. School staff was rated as the second most impactful factor in deciding to continue working in a school, but it isn't clear what elements of school staff led to it being so influential.
 - a. Thinking about a positive school staff experience you've had at a school. Tell me about the interactions among staff.
 - b. What is it about school staff that would lead a teacher to want to stay?
9. Have you ever considered leaving the field?
 - a. Can you tell me about that time in your life/career?
 - b. Why did you decide not to leave?
 - c. What has changed in your life/career since then?
10. What motivates you to continue teaching?
11. What else is important to know about you as a mid-career teacher?