

Approach to Teacher Retention in High Needs Schools:

Understanding Why Teachers Stay

by

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ABSTRACT

Each year school districts across the United States are faced with the task of hiring the best teachers they can for the open positions in their schools. In many urban school districts, this task can be particularly daunting. Compared to suburban school districts, urban school districts tend to have higher teacher exit rates, which places additional strain upon the districts' schools and their resources. Research shows that there are many factors associated with teachers' decisions to stay at or leave a school. This study aims to determine how the common attrition and retention factors that influence a teacher's decision to stay or leave by interviewing current and former teachers at a Title I school in an urban setting.

In this study, I interviewed a small, targeted sample of highly valued teachers while I was their school leader. The interview was designed to use questions that elicit teachers' perspectives about the retention and attrition factors identified in the research in hopes of determining patterns I could use to strategically use to build a teacher retention plan. Analysis of the responses from the interviews included a comparison of composite teacher profiles, each representing a sub-group of teachers with common attributes. This process demonstrated that while factors commonly associated with retention were important, the degree to which specific factors shaped a teacher's decision to stay or leave is dependent upon their experience and background and where they are in the phases of their careers and life. Additionally, this study identified how school leaders can strategically use a similar interview process to retain key teaching personnel based upon their personal and professional motivations

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this work to my children, Annabelle and Charlie. You, along with all children, deserve to learn from the best teachers, and we, the adults, should be doing all we can to ensure that happens for you.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The Problem

Each year school districts across the United States are faced with the task of hiring the best teachers they can for the open positions in their schools. In many urban school districts, this task can be particularly daunting when challenging circumstances and limited resources often deter potential teachers from the profession rather than attract them. Moreover, because of the substantial decline in the number of students entering education programs in colleges and universities, and many current teachers seemingly leaving the profession altogether, there does appear to be a looming teacher crisis across the United States (Sutcher et al., 2016).

In Arizona, since the mid-2000s political and economic factors have shaped the current crisis where in 2016, nearly 2,000 teaching positions went unfilled during the school year (Irish, 2016). In the Phoenix metropolitan area, school districts' budgets took multiple hits because of SB 1070, a state law that targeted undocumented workers. Many families moved to other states with less stringent immigration policies, which, coupled with the collapse of the housing bubble led to steep declines in enrollment in many districts. Some school districts were forced to make severe cuts to staffing in an effort to bring their budgets into balance. In the wake of the economic recovery, many schools and districts hoped to reverse the previous years' staff reductions and replenish their faculties with teachers ready to take on the challenges of educating youth. Unfortunately, many of these same schools and districts found themselves in the midst of a massive

teacher shortage which has resulted in stiff competition for a drastically decreased candidate pool.

While some schools and districts have been able to weather both the economic challenges of the Great Recession and the competitive teacher recruitment field in the wake of the economic recovery, there are districts, such as the Desert Central School District (DCSD), a small inner-city school district in Phoenix, that have struggled with high teacher turnover during both periods and must scramble to fill vacant positions year after year, which is costly and absorbs already scarce resources (NCTAF, 2007). DCSD expends a substantial amount of time, fiscal, and personnel resources to recruit, train, and prepare incoming teachers for the rigors of teaching in a school district with a high percentage of Title 1 students. In addition to advertising and marketing expenses, the Human Resources Department sends several employees to job fairs in Phoenix, throughout Arizona, and nationally to recruit teachers to apply for positions in their district's schools. For highly competitive positions, they often use placement programs and/or contracting services, which may charge placement or finders fees for any teachers who sign contracts. Human resources employees spend hours screening and interviewing potential teachers to determine their fit for the schools, positions, and the students served by the district's schools. Districts like DCSD willingly expend these efforts in recruitment and hiring with the goal of keeping teachers in the schools and districts for multiple years.

Once hired, these teachers are paid to participate in a four-day induction program designed to provide teachers who are new to the district with the information, knowledge,

and techniques that will increase their likelihood for success in its schools. Throughout the year, they participate in several more hours of additional training and professional development, at both the district and site levels, to build their instructional capacity. Furthermore, new teachers are given priority to receive individual support from instructional coaches at their school sites to help them to adapt to new practices at their schools in addition to the support all teachers receive throughout the school year. Providing these professional supports to teachers, while important, are costly for the district. Optimistically, district leaders view these expenditures as investments in new teachers' potential to make a positive academic impact on the district's students, not only for the upcoming school year, but hopefully for years to come. Realistically, with the teacher attrition rate the district is experiencing, many teachers participating in these induction activities will not stay beyond their first three years in the district.

There are nine schools in DCSD, each employing between 20 to 50 teachers, depending upon the enrollment of each site, which varies from 400 to 950 students. Since the beginning of the economic downturn and the enforcement of SB 1070, both in 2008, there have never been fewer than 50 new teachers starting the year in Desert Central, even during the height of the budget crisis, which is the equivalent to the entire staff of the district's largest school. At the beginning of the 2017-18 school year, over 80 new teachers were hired. While it is clear that there are a number of teachers who choose to stay in DCSD each year, these figures suggest that over the course of three years, the school district has potentially hired nearly 300 teachers, nearly 75% of all the teachers employed by the district. Furthermore, there has been a nearly 25% increase in the

number of teachers hired into the district over the course of three years. As mentioned earlier, the sheer amount of time, money, and resources being invested into hiring and providing professional development to new teachers each year in this school district suggests that teacher turnover is a significant problem for the district.

Table 1

New Teachers Hired in DCSD

	Total Teachers (N)	New Teachers N (%)
2014-2015	399	78 (20)
2015-2016	396	107 (27)
2016-2017	388	105 (27)

Research also indicates that beyond fiscal resources, other resources are depleted with high teacher turnover (Barnes et al., 2007; Ronfeldt, 2013). Among these are the knowledge and skills necessary for the sustainability of district reform efforts that promote student learning and achievement (National Center for Education Statistics, 2004). In 2008, DCSD was labeled a failing school district by the Arizona Department of Education. Over the three years prior, student academic performance on state standardized assessments was well below state averages, and there was little to no growth for students overall, and in particular, amongst student subgroups such as special education and English language learners. With the goal of improving student growth and achievement, DCSD instituted major, systemic reforms in the subsequent years. For

example, DCSD entered into a six-year, multi-million dollar partnership with a national education consulting firm. Through this partnership, all teachers and administrators received intense professional development, training, and coaching support aimed at improving student achievement. During this period, the school district hired nearly 300 teachers, which suggests that at least as many teachers who received this training and support could have left the district. Losing teachers who have received countless hours of intensive job-embedded professional development makes it difficult to sustain district initiatives. Yet teacher turnover has remained an issue, and as a result, many of the initiatives associated with the partnership are no longer being implemented.

With such large numbers of new teachers hired year after year, in recent years, DCSD has taken measures to determine why teachers are leaving. The Human Resource Department has used exit surveys and interviews with teachers. While the methods and implementation has varied each year, the district leadership reflects on the response rates and validity of responses to inform the following year's exit survey/interview criteria. This information has been informative and useful for the district, but because this information is not collected until after teachers have decided to leave, it has been difficult for school and district leaders to use this information proactively to support teacher retention. That is, teacher retention is the converse of attrition.

In addition, to identify the factors teachers prioritize and value in their working environment, for the past three years, DCSD has had its employees participate in the Teaching, Empowering, Leading, and Learning (TELL) Survey. Research behind the TELL survey suggests that teaching and learning conditions are associated with teacher

retention. (Borman & Dowling, 2008). Since 2015, the district has asked certified employees, which includes classroom teachers, teacher certified support staff and administrators, to take the survey. In 2016-17, 91.9% of certified employees completed the survey across the district.

The 2017 TELL survey assessed eight core constructs: Time, Facilities and Resources, Community Support and Involvement, Managing Student Conduct, Teacher Leadership, School Leadership, Professional Development, Instructional Practices and Support. These core constructs provide insight into how teachers feel about many aspects of their work in DCSD; however, the data is not compiled until the end of the school year or during the summer. While the responses to this survey may assist administrators in Title 1 schools in making informed decisions to improve working conditions for the upcoming school year, it does not ask specific questions about a teacher's decision to seek employment elsewhere, nor does it provide timely information that can be used to influence retention (Creno, 2014). To make proactive decisions about retention, school administrators need a means of finding out what factors influence their teachers' decisions to stay at or leave a school, and a way to gather feedback from their teachers that would enable them to make real-time changes that may positively influence staff retention.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to examine why teachers choose to leave or stay in schools with a high percentage of Title 1 students, like the majority of those in the Desert Central School District. For urban school districts, it is challenging to remedy teacher

retention issues. Often, these districts have interested stakeholders ranging from teacher associations, parent groups, and state monitoring agencies who are more than ready to blame school and district personnel for low teacher retention rates. For many groups it may be easier to highlight factors, such as student demographics, accountability systems, administrative support, and initiatives that result in high teacher turnover. While these may all contribute to teacher retention issues, without knowing which factors teachers take into consideration when deciding to stay or leave a school, it is difficult for school administrators to make strategic changes that improve retention in their schools.

Furthermore, many of the means administrators have to gather information about why teachers stay or leave are often implemented at the end of the school year, after teachers have made their employment decisions. Gathering different data regarding teachers' motivations for staying or leaving a school earlier in the school year may help administrators make more timely decisions that could influence teachers, who may have been planning to leave their schools, to stay.

Significance

Understanding and analyzing which factors teachers prioritize in their working environments and the factors' relationship to teacher retention is significant for urban school districts across the country which experience a 30% higher turnover rate when compared to the rest of the nation's schools (Ingersoll 2001; Sutchter et al., 2016). This is especially significant when considering that urban schools make up more than 27% of the schools and enroll over 30% of the nation's public school students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2014, Fall)

For the Desert Central School District, a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing why teachers stay or leave their schools has potential to help school and district administrators address their teacher retention problem in two ways: teacher recruitment and teacher interventions. First, this information would be helpful with recruitment efforts. Currently the district spends a significant amount of money to send personnel to job fairs around Arizona and sometimes in other states. Furthermore, in order to fill highly competitive positions, the Human Resource Department uses placement programs and contracting services like Teach For America, The Phoenix Teaching Fellows, and Stromberg and Associates which may charge placement or finders fees for any teachers who sign a contract. Clear data about teachers who are looking for specific types of work environments would help district and school administrators strategically focus recruitment efforts in ways that target teachers that may be a better match for a particular school or our district.

Second, knowing why teachers tend to stay in schools like those in DCSD gives administrators insights into the teachers who may be leaning toward leaving. If these are teachers that the school's leadership team is interested in retaining, they can use this information to target those teachers and provide interventions, such as professional development and coaching support to address their needs more effectively.

Research Question

Compared to suburban school districts, urban school districts tend to have higher exit rates, which place additional strain upon the districts' schools and their resources. While research has demonstrated that there are many factors associated with

teachers' decisions to leave, for individual school leaders, it may be more effective to identify the factors that might influence teachers to remain teaching in a school. (Sutcher et al., 2016). This study will address the following question:

What factors influence teachers to leave or continue to teach in urban schools with a high percentage of Title I students?

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

This chapter is an overview of the literature that outlines the factors associated with teacher attrition and retention: teacher qualifications such as education, experience, and credentials; teacher preparation in the form of administrative support, mentoring, and professional development; and working conditions, which include both external and internal factors.

Teacher Qualifications

For most school human resource departments and administrators, the teacher retention challenge starts long before teachers are hired for specific positions. To support their efforts to build robust hiring pools, many districts have annual budgets for advertising, travel, and fees to recruitment and job fairs around the country, as well as paid partnerships with outside organizations that assist in alternative certification for teacher placement. Additionally, with an increasing shortage of teachers, many states, like Arizona, are offering alternative types of certification that allow schools to hire teachers who have not gone through a college or university program specializing in education but who are interested in teaching while simultaneously working toward a teaching degree. While human resource departments work toward compiling a large hiring pool, research suggests that who is hired and what kind of teacher preparation and work experience they have may have an impact on who stays or leaves a school after they are hired (Sutcher et al., 2016).

Having a solid foundation of knowledge, experience, and support goes far in almost any professional field to prepare employees for success in their endeavors. In this aspect, teaching is no different. However, since the 1990s, state teacher certification requirements often change based on the political or fiscal environment or different types of schools may have different certification requirements. Federal policies such as Title I and II, which provides financial assistance to schools and school districts with high percentages of children from low-income families, require those districts to hire highly qualified teachers as a means to increasing students' access to high quality learning opportunities. During teaching shortages, these requirements often conflict with the competitive atmosphere that has been created in part by charter schools, which are not constrained by these requirements when hiring teachers, as well as competition from other districts.

Additionally, periods of teacher shortages have resulted in fluctuations in certification requirements outlined by state education departments (Sutcher et al., 2016). These conflicting agendas often leave state teacher certification units challenged to establish requirements for teacher licensure that are aligned with federal expectations, yet open enough to meet the demand for teachers. In Arizona, where there is a high demand for teachers, the Arizona Department of Education's certification unit has established more flexible certification requirements by creating different types of certification such as intern certificates, which allow teachers with a college degree to teach while taking the college courses required to make them highly qualified, or emergency certificates that let

college graduates teach for up to a year to see if teaching is a career they would like to pursue.

Colleges and non-profit organizations have responded to the requirements set by state certification units. Teachers are no longer mandated to earning a teaching degree in a four-year undergraduate program with a mix of college courses, intern hours, and student teaching for a semester. Now, there are multiple ways teachers can simultaneously take coursework, teach, and earn a salary. Alternative pipeline organizations, like Teach for America or the Phoenix Teaching Fellows, will recruit uncertified teacher candidates and work with school districts for placement, local colleges for credits and classes, and state departments of education to help their candidates get certified. Over multiple decades, this has resulted in a teacher workforce with varying degrees of preparation, which may influence whether teachers choose to remain in teaching or leave the field within their first few years in the classroom. For school leaders, all these factors mean that the work needed to retain teachers may in fact begin prior to hiring teachers.

Schooling and Credentials

As the demand for teachers has grown, many schools have had difficulties finding qualified teachers to fill positions. To address both the immediate needs of staffing schools and to respond to the looming forecast of severe teacher shortages to come, policymakers at the state, district, and school levels have instituted a wide range of initiatives to recruit new teachers (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003). Among these are programs designed to entice midcareer professionals to teaching and alternative certification

programs to allow college graduates to postpone formal education training, obtain an emergency certificate, and begin teaching immediately (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003). While these reforms may increase the number of people eligible to teach in a classroom, they do little to address one of the reasons there is a teacher shortage: 50% of all beginning teachers leave the classroom within their first five years of teaching (Sutcher et al., 2016). By replacing relatively new teachers who leave with new teachers, and underqualified teachers at that, we may be perpetuating a cycle of teacher attrition.

According to Ingersoll (1999, 2004), a qualified teacher holds a teaching certificate or license in the field that he or she teaches and has either a major or a minor in his or her area of instruction. Based on this definition, there are an alarming number of underqualified teachers teaching, particularly in secondary classrooms (Creno, 2014; Ingersoll, 1999, 2004). Furthermore, research suggests that in high-poverty schools, the number of teachers working on emergency certificates is three times higher than low-poverty schools (Ingersoll, 1999; Sutcher et al., 2016).

These are all significant challenges for school leaders who must staff their schools. Students come to school regardless if there is a teacher to teach them, so schools cannot simply leave a position open, without a teacher. As a result, many school leaders resort to hiring teachers on alternative or emergency certification. Unfortunately, this may not bode well for these teachers' self-efficacy, as it forces these new teachers to master the multiple components of teaching, such as grading, discipline, and management while they are simultaneously learning them. This can be not only overwhelming and challenging for the teacher, but also self-defeating and often results in the teacher leaving

the school or the profession. This cycle of attrition aligns with research stating that the odds of teachers without a certificate leaving the profession are 2.64 times greater than those with a certificate (Borman & Dowling, 2008).

Previous Teaching Experience and School Moves

As an industry, education services make up a large part of the workforce in the United States, representing, 9.7 % of all workers (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016). The number of teachers in the workforce, combined with the high percentage of annual turnover means that within the teaching occupation, there are a large number of teachers that flow into, between, and out of schools each year (Ingersoll & Smith 2003; Powers & Pivovarova, 2017). Generally speaking, while one third of the teachers leave due to retirement, the remaining two-thirds leave for personal reasons, such as to find better position in another school, or they leave the profession altogether (Irish, 2016). While not all employee turnover is necessarily negative, continued high levels of turnover can have serious consequences for districts, schools and students, among which are staffing problems, negative effects on school environments, and student performance issues, all of which can be costly (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003; Powers & Pivovarova, 2017). Studies that have quantified the costs related to teacher turnover have determined that teacher turnover can cost states hundreds of millions of dollars each year (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). Moreover, ignoring such costs is not fiscally responsible. A teacher leaving a school to work at another school or district can also be costly to a school system, even if that teacher is not leaving the profession (Boe, 2008; Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017).

Research shows that experience plays a role in teacher attrition, especially in highly specialized subject areas like special education and mathematics. Teachers with one to three years of teaching experience have the highest rate of attrition and migration, both of which decline significantly by a teacher's fifth year (Boe, 2008; Carver-Thomas & Darling Hammond, 2017). While subgroups of teachers leave for a variety of reasons, such as retirement or a career change, there is also evidence that in any given year one third of teachers who had previously left the profession return depending upon the economy (Irish, 2016; see also Boe, 2008; Sutchter et al., 2016).

For school administrators this ebb and flow of teachers within as well as out of the system may be an opportunity for retention. Many teachers leave their first schools of employment with clear ideas of what they do not want in their future working environments. Furthermore, teachers who stay in the profession and are professionally satisfied with their subsequent placements are more likely to stay at those schools. In other words, based upon their initial experiences, teachers often know what they are looking for in their next workplaces, and are vetting schools and school leaders when pursuing new positions. During the hiring process, understanding teachers' reasons for leaving their former schools, identifying needs for support, and establishing future goals may help to retain teachers.

The Role of School Principal in Teacher Attrition and Retention

Comprehensive research on high-poverty schools finds that the most significant workplace condition that influences teacher attrition and retention is the school principal. An administrator's ability to encourage and acknowledge staff, communicate a clear

vision, and effectively manage a school are strongly associated with teacher retention (Sutcher et al., 2016). Aside from these administration duties, other teacher retention factors are functions of a school principal's approach to teacher support, such as their ability to create a collaborative supportive environment, manage resources, and solicit teacher input on decisions affecting the school (Sutcher et al., 2016).

Teacher Preparation

Professional Development and Support

Teaching requires deep understanding of pedagogical and content knowledge as well as strong organizational, management, and interpersonal skills. While many teacher preparation programs require both academic and practical experience such as student teaching or intern hours, it is not until the teacher is actually in the classroom in front of their 20 to 30 students for an entire school day that the marriage between the two actually comes into play. For many school administrators this is where the direct impact on teacher retention and attrition begins.

Teaching can be a very lonely job. Although teaching involves intensive interaction with young people, the work of teachers is largely done in isolation from their colleagues (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004). This isolation can be further compounded by the fact that teachers have a tremendous amount of responsibility for the learning, engagement, and safety of 20 to 30 individuals for the vast majority of the school day. For these reasons critics have described teaching as a “boot camp” or “trial by fire” experience because of the overwhelming amount of responsibility and management skills that must be demonstrated by a teacher once the school bell rings (Smith & Ingersoll,

2004, p. 682). In response to these concerns, many school systems have invested in support systems and programs to help influence a teacher's decision to stay for the long term once they have accepted a teaching position (Sutcher et al., 2016).

Induction Programs

Research strongly indicates that there is a link between the availability of effective supports for new teachers and lower rates of turnover (Sutcher et al., 2016). Beginning teachers who are provided with multiple supports are less likely to move to other schools and less likely to leave the profession after their first year. This research, along with legislative support through the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002, and more recently, in its updated version, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), emphasizes the value of effective support for teachers (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004). These legislative mandates, which are tied to federal funding to assist with teacher support, have resulted in the development of induction programs to support teachers in school systems across the country.

Research suggests that while commonly found in other professions, structured job induction programs were not typically found in education until more recently (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004). In an effort to slow down the 'revolving door' of teacher attrition, some districts and schools developed structured support programs designed to bridge the transition from a teacher preparation program to the classroom (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004). However, more recent research indicates that pre-employment teacher preparation is rarely sufficient to provide all of the knowledge and skills necessary for a successful teaching experience, and a high-quality induction program may actually help to alleviate

the discrepancy between the new teachers' expectations and the realities of the job that they experience (Varrati, Lavine, & Turner, 2009). Schools must provide environments where novices are able to learn the craft and survive and succeed as teachers. Ideally these support programs will prevent the loss of teachers while also improving the growth and learning of students (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011).

For the most part, teacher induction programs have multiple objectives, among them teacher socialization, adjustment, development, and assessment. Activities aimed at addressing these objectives include orientation sessions, professional learning collaborations, meetings with administration, extra assistance, and in particular, mentoring (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). With these components in mind, there is reason to believe that high-quality mentoring and induction programs for teachers early in their careers may increase the likelihood that that teachers will stay in their jobs, because they may help teachers build competence and self-efficacy in the profession (Sutcher et al., 2016). Teachers with low self-efficacy tend to focus on the short-comings and deficits of their surroundings (Sass, 2012). Simply stated, teachers who feel successful in the classroom also have higher job satisfaction, which makes it more likely they will stay in their positions for the long run (Sutcher et al., 2016).

While research has determined that induction programs help beginning teachers, as we know from previous studies and more recent research regarding teacher shortages, teachers that are new to a school or district are not necessarily brand-new teachers (Sutcher et al., 2016). This group may also include teachers with several years of teaching experience, and these teachers may also need supports to aid in their transition

to their new schools. Many schools have been reluctant or have not been able to develop a system that gradually and adequately prepares teachers for the complex job of teaching, or they have oversimplified the process for providing support based solely on a teacher's years of experience. (Borman & Dowling, 2008). An effective teacher induction program must address the wide range of needs, strengths, and/or weaknesses teachers may have, whether they are new to the field or come to the school with experience. Additionally, program coordinators and teacher trainers need to be well versed in identifying teachers' needs and scaffolding their approaches accordingly (Sass, 2012). Therefore, while there are no stringent guidelines regarding induction programs, school administrators need to clearly understand the typical components of a high-quality induction program, primarily professional development and support, and how they interact together to help teachers as they develop (Varrati et al., 2009).

Mentoring, Collaboration, and Collegial Support

As mentioned earlier, mentoring is a major component of an effective induction program, and there is evidence that it is a form of support that is valued by teachers. (Simon & Johnson, 2015). New teachers often feel ineffective in the classroom, and this feeling can be compounded by the isolation of the job (Shernoff et al., 2011). Ideally, a structured mentoring program helps new teachers adjust to their roles and increases their efficacy and job satisfaction, thus increasing teacher retention (Ingersoll 2003; Smith & Ingersoll, 2004). Mentoring programs are most effective when they match new teachers with mentors from the same field, align common planning times, and have regularly scheduled collaboration times (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011; see also Smith & Ingersoll,

2004). Without these structures, new teachers may find themselves struggling privately with their problems or fearing that their school administration or colleagues may find out that not everything is right in their classroom. (Shernoff et al., 2011). A strong mentoring program with the aforementioned characteristics allows new teachers to reflect on their instruction and plan lessons collaboratively so that they feel supported rather than judged (Wiebke & Bardin, 2009). Furthermore, a well-designed mentoring program that builds in structures for productive communication between the mentor and mentee can also foster norms for professional collaboration and connectedness for the entire school staff, not just novice teachers and their mentors (Simon & Johnson, 2015).

Working in an inclusive environment where teachers trust and respect one another and share a set of professional goals and purposes is an important element of retention. A teacher's perception about collegial connections, faculty cohesiveness, and a supportive school community may be a decisive factor as to whether or not they stay in teaching (Kardos & Johnson, 2007). Teachers often rely upon their colleagues for both professional and personal support, particularly in schools with a large percentage of Title I students where students have substantial academic needs (Simon & Johnson, 2015). Additionally, teachers report higher levels of satisfaction with their schools when systems and norms for collaboration amongst colleagues are established (Kardos & Johnson, 2007; Simon & Johnson, 2015).

While a well-designed mentoring program is one way to facilitate collaboration, collaboration among teachers may also be achieved through Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) or teacher instructional teams (Battersby & Verdi, 2015; see also

Simon & Johnson, 2015). Teachers report feeling more support from their colleagues when they found their work on these types of teams not only met their individual needs, but those of their schools as well (Simon & Johnson, 2015). These connections with their colleagues not only help teachers improve and build upon their own effectiveness, but also foster a sense of belonging which encourages a commitment to teaching in general. (Shernoff et al., 2011). Furthermore, teachers report that relationships with team members help them understand the need for participation in other collaborative opportunities on a campus and make them feel valued for the contributions they make (Clandinin et al., 2015). When these structures are in place, teachers view themselves as part of a collective entity that shares responsibility for one another, their students, and the school community (Simon & Johnson, 2015).

Overall structured teacher support programs, especially those with mentoring programs and systems to promote structured collaboration amongst staff members generally had positive effects on teachers' job satisfaction and retention (Battersby & Verdi, 2015; see also Ingersoll & Strong, 2011; Kardos & Johnson, 2007; Shernoff et al., 2011; Smith & Ingersoll, 2004). This finding was consistent with the results of a secondary analysis of the Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS). However, this analysis also indicated that while teachers in schools with 50% or more students participating in the free and reduced lunch program are as likely to participate in induction and mentoring as teachers working in schools with a low percentage of kids participating in the free and reduced lunch program, the effects of induction programs on reducing turnover in high poverty schools was small and statistically insignificant (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). One

explanation for this puzzling finding may be that in low-income schools where teacher turnover is consistently higher than 20% every year, whole faculties can be replaced over the course of five years. In these settings, having a well-designed, structured mentor program can be challenging and meaningful interactions for collaboration can be difficult, given the disproportionately large number of novice teachers these schools may have. (Hanushek & Rivken, 2007; Simon & Johnson, 2015). However, there may be other factors outside of a robust induction program related to working conditions that influence teacher attrition which I review below.

External and Internal Working Conditions

Interestingly, many teachers teach in schools with high percentages of low-income and minority students because they want to work with underserved communities. When these teachers do leave these schools, it is often because the working conditions in their schools impede their ability to teach and for their students to learn (Simon & Johnson, 2015). In determining whether to stay or leave, teachers took factors such as principal leadership, school disorder, and professional control into consideration (Simon & Johnson, 2015). The following sections are an overview of factors that are external to the school, such as state and district policies and compensation that influence the work environment, as well as internal factors such as facilities, resources, time, and student discipline.

External Factors

Since the mid-1990s, teachers' salaries have been declining in relation to other professional salaries. Nationally, beginning teachers earn about 20% less than individuals

with college degrees in other fields and that gap continues to widen to 30% by mid-career (Sutcher et al., 2016). In many states, many teachers must take on second jobs either during the year or in the summer to supplement their incomes. While compensation may not be the primary motivation for teachers to enter the field, it is increasingly becoming more difficult for teachers to sustain a middle-class lifestyle on a teacher's salary, resulting in many teachers leaving the field in favor of higher paying professions (Hanushek & Rivken, 2007; Sutcher et al., 2016). In high-needs under-resourced school districts, inequities in funding may further compound a school's ability to attract and retain teachers, simply because teachers may be able to take less demanding positions and jobs in another school (Gonzalez et al., 2008; see also Sutcher et al., 2016)

Another external factor that influences teachers' satisfaction is the extent of their professional control over their working environments (Simon & Johnson, 2015). Federal, state, and district policies related to testing and accountability can limit teacher autonomy in their classrooms (Sutcher et al., 2016). Accountability pressures, like those tied to NCLB, which has been replaced by ESSA, also discourage many teachers from staying in high needs schools, especially when those pressures are tied to negative labels and sanctions (Sutcher et al., 2016). Teachers cite dissatisfaction with both the influence of assessment and accountability measures on their curricula, and the support they receive in preparing students for assessments as reasons for leaving the profession (Sutcher et al., 2016). These findings are even more concerning for high-poverty schools, which depend upon Title I and II funding to support a portion of their overall budgets. This funding is directly tied to the accountability measures outlined in these policies. The pressure in

these schools for students to perform well on these assessments and to adhere to mandates outlined by these policies may be even higher for teachers at these schools, which can result in higher turnover.

Internal Factors

As discussed earlier in this section, teachers value a collaborative, supportive environment where they are supported in their professional growth and pedagogical understanding to be effective teachers. At the same time, teachers have greater job satisfaction when they have the material and temporal resources to teach effectively. These can include smaller classes or pupil caseloads, adequate materials and supplies, and minimal intrusions on teaching time (Sutcher et al., 2016). In Arizona, where per-pupil funding among the lowest in the country, ensuring teachers have appropriate class sizes, well-maintained facilities, and adequate resources can be difficult on a very tight budget. While these attributes may not be the primary influence on teachers' decision to leave a school or the field, in conjunction with other working conditions they do contribute to attrition and retention (Sutcher et al., 2016).

Another internal factor related to the physical working conditions in a school is the management of and teachers' perception of student discipline (Gonzalez et al., 2008). Most new teachers struggle with appropriate management of discipline, which can affect the amount of teaching that takes place in a classroom (Allensworth, 2009; Gonzalez et al., 2008; Ingersoll, 2004). Disruptive classroom behavior can be very frustrating to teachers, especially when it affects their perception of school-wide management of discipline (Simon & Johnson, 2015). Teachers want to teach in environments where both

they and students feel safe, and where they know that consistent discipline policies are in place (Simon & Johnson, 2015). Consistent policies and support for discipline can positively influence teacher attrition because a safe environment for teachers and students contributes to a positive, productive school climate that supports what is best for children (Sutcher et al., 2016). Conversely, in schools where disciplinary infractions may be more common, teachers may be more likely to leave, even though the behaviors may not always be violent or disruptive. Similarly, student apathy or disengagement is enough to make teachers feel undermined and ineffective (Simon & Johnson, 2015). Furthermore, student behavior both influences and is influenced by teacher attrition. When there is high teacher turnover, students can become demoralized when their teachers leave, creating trust and respect issues for incoming teachers (Simon & Johnson, 2015).

In the chapter that follows, I describe the study I will conduct to assess the possible utility of “stay” interviews, or interviews aimed at proactively identifying the conditions that will encourage teachers to stay at a school (Sullivan, 2013).

Chapter 3: Methods

Introduction

This chapter explains the methods that I used to identify the factors that influence teachers to continue to teach in urban schools with a high percentage of Title I students. This component of the study is a qualitative analysis of the use of stay interviews with teachers by school principals to find out what factors influence teachers to leave or stay at a school. Additionally, I use the district's separation data for the 2018 school year to determine if the findings from an analysis of administrative data align with the insights gathered in the interviews I conducted. The teacher-level administrative data available includes age, gender, race/ethnicity/ years of experience, and level of schooling.

Context and Access

This section describes the school district and school where these interviews took place. The names and locations of both have been masked.

Desert Central School District

The Desert Central School District, located in Central Phoenix, has nine schools serving 6000+ students. Every school serves students in kindergarten through eighth grade. The district staffs each school at a ratio of one teacher to 26 students, hiring 237 homeroom teachers in the district as a whole. Additionally, each school hires teacher certified support staff to assist with special education, special area instruction, reading intervention, and teacher coaching. The Desert Central School District serves a diverse student population. While the district as a whole has a 92% Title I population as measured by the percentage of students qualifying for free or reduced lunch, almost all of

the students at eight schools qualify for free and reduced lunch, while one school serves a much smaller percentage of free and reduced lunch students (38%). The majority of students (84%) in the Desert Central School District identify as Hispanic. Of the remaining students, 6% are White, 5% are Black, 3% are Native American, and 1% are Asian.

In 2019, the schools in the district received accountability ratings from the Arizona Department Education based on a score of 100. Schools are given points for achievement on the state standardized assessments, student growth, and school readiness factors, such as attendance and inclusion of special education students. Based on this score, a school receives a letter grade. The school that served 38% free and reduced lunch students was awarded a B. The remaining schools served 93% or higher free and reduced lunch students and were awarded Cs or Ds. This study takes place at Desert Central School, where I served as the principal.

Desert Central School

Desert Central School is located in Central Phoenix, at the intersection of a major national interstate and two state route freeways. Additionally, Desert Central School sits at the cross section of two major thoroughfares in the city with access to Sky Harbor International Airport, the county hospital, and the county jail nearby. These dynamics create an industrial, urban setting around or near the school. Built in 2001, the school is relatively modern compared to the other schools in the district. The facilities are clean and safe with a lot of green space and three shaded playground areas for children.

Desert Central School serves a diverse student population with nearly 800 students. The school has a 97% Title I population as measured by the percentage of students qualifying for free or reduced lunch. The majority of students (89%) at Desert Central School identify as Hispanic. Of the remaining students, 1% are White, 6% are Black, 2% are Native America, and less than one percent are Asian. Ten percent of Desert Central School's students identify as homeless under the McKinney-Vinto Act. The school recently received a "C" school grade from the state, which is considered academically performing.

The school has a staffing a ratio of one teacher to 26 students for 32 classroom teachers. There are 16 additional teacher certified support staff to assist with special education, special area instruction, reading intervention, and teacher coaching.

Participants and Selection Process

The process I used to select participants to interview started with my personal knowledge of potential candidates. Since I was a supervisor for some of the interviewees at the time, I worked with my dissertation chair and the IRB process until I received approval from the school district to clearly communicate the intention of the study and to solicit participants without compromising the employer/employee relationship. These parties determined that the best way to do this would be for me to send a list of potential candidates and contact information to my dissertation chair, who contacted them directly but did not inform me who she contacted. Once they agreed to participate, I contacted them directly to schedule interviews.

Interview Participants

The initial list of possible interviews included three types of teachers: a) teachers with 3+ years of experience and currently working at the school; b) teachers who resigned from the school, but chose to return; and c) teachers who resigned from the school. My goal was to interview teachers with three or more years of experience because research indicates that teachers tend to leave within the first five years of teaching (Powers & Pivovarova, 2017). Teachers in their third year have benefitted from the training and support offered by both the school and the district, but they are still in the critical time period where they may still be making decisions about staying or leaving. It was my belief that these teachers have enough teaching experience to articulate what they like about the school and why they either chose to come to the school or stay at the school, and why they left or may consider leaving. Additionally, I wanted to interview teachers who were teachers I wanted to retain based upon their effectiveness in the classroom and positive work history. Therefore, I only recommended teachers who had scored proficient or higher on the district evaluation system and had not received some form of professional discipline. From the list of possible interviewees, seven teachers agreed to participate in this study, with at least one representative from each group.

Instrument and Procedures Used in Data Collection

I developed a protocol that drew on the major findings for teacher retention and attrition in the literature review. The protocol included the nature and intent of the interview, an introduction to be read to the participant, and the interview questions. The introduction portion of the protocol specified the purpose of the interview, a disclaimer

about my role as their current supervisor, information regarding the use of recording devices and transcription services, as well as a passage asking for their verbal consent. The interview questions were grouped in categories aligned with factors commonly attributed to retention and attrition. They were designed to serve as a guideline for questioning the participants in the context of a semi-structured interview. The interview was meant to be conversational and allow for follow-up questions as needed and also allow the participants to discuss issues that they saw as significant beyond those raised by the questions. I piloted the interview questions with individuals who were not participating in the study. The areas the protocol covered included:

- Experience, schooling, credentials: 3 questions
- School selection/staying factors: 2 questions
- Mentoring/collegial support: 1 question
- Induction/professional development: 1 question
- Administrative support: 1 question
- Working conditions, both internal (resources, facilities, discipline) and external (efficacy/autonomy): 5 questions
- Optional probing questions about job satisfaction: 5 questions

The questions were meant to be a guideline to promote conversation and to help the interview remain on topic while promoting conversation and allowing for follow up on additional topics that came up.

Interview Protocol

I arranged to meet each of the interviewees for a face-to-face meeting. The interviews needed to happen in a quiet place as they were being recorded, so I offered my office as an option, but opened it up to other options for the participants. All but one chose to have the interview in my office. One teacher asked that I conduct the interview in her classroom. I started each interview by thanking them for coming and reading the introduction to the protocol to get a recorded consent (Appendix B). I added the following line when interviewing teachers who currently worked at the school:

As your current supervisor, I recognize you may be reluctant to consent or may feel uncomfortable discussing some topic with me...and is in not tied to your position at Desert Central School or with the Desert Central School district.

I felt it was important to record the consent, especially for those teachers who were currently employed at the school and whom I supervised at the time. None of the participants declined.

I began the interviews by asking teachers about how they entered the teaching profession to gain information about their schooling, experience, and certification. During the interview I prompted the teachers with other questions from the protocol as needed to encourage conversation. I made some notes about the interview process, but I did not want to distract from the flow of the conversation so I kept notetaking at a minimum and depended primarily on the recording and transcription process to capture the interview. I typically ended the interviews by asking the teachers how they felt about the process and thanked them for their participation. The interviews ranged from 27 minutes to 73 minutes. After the interviews, I uploaded the audio from the interviews into

a password secure account in MP3 form and had them transcribed through a service called Rev at rev.com.

After reading the transcriptions and verifying their accuracy by listening to the audio and making corrections as needed, I began the process of reviewing the interviews and identifying categories for the responses. Once I had established potential categories, I began by classifying the participants' responses into these categories, creating a matrix to use to compare the teachers' responses to one another.

Teacher Interviews

For this study, I was able to conduct interviews with seven teachers, with at least one teacher from each of the three categories I was targeting.

- a) Five of the teachers were current teachers in the school, with three or more years of teaching experience.
- b) One of the teachers was a current teacher who had left the school but had returned to teach at the school.
- c) One of the teachers had left the school.

Teacher Profiles

This is an introduction to the teachers with their background information and motivations for teaching and selecting this school for employment. I used pseudonyms to mask their identities.

Heather. For the past six years, Heather has been a kindergarten teacher at Desert Central School. She originally went to college to major in social work but switched in her junior year to education. A primary reason she switched majors was because of her

experience volunteering as a homeroom parent at her children's school. While there, she interacted with children on a regular basis. She enjoyed the experience and some of her children's teachers suggested she should become a teacher, and as a result, she received a bachelor's degree in education.

Heather has spent the entirety of her teaching experience teaching within the same district, but at two different schools. She taught second grade at her first school for 12 years and really enjoyed the early years at her first school. She speaks highly of the school's vision and mission, the collaboration amongst colleagues at her school, and her experience working with university professors who often visited her classroom as part of a school partnership.

About six years into her experience at her first school, the school-wide focus and the school administration changed. While she personally liked the new principal, she said many people began to leave, including many colleagues she considered to be master teachers. When her health started to become affected by the changes, she decided to leave. For the next year she did some substituting in the district and was asked to take a long-term substitute position for a kindergarten teacher at Desert Central School. She was a little apprehensive to teach kindergarten, but she really enjoyed working with the students and the people at Desert Central School. When the teacher she was covering for decided to take another position the next year, she applied for the kindergarten position and has been there since.

Allie. Allie started this school year teaching fifth-grade science and social studies. She has been a teacher at Desert Central School for four years with a two-year break after

her second year. She has been a teacher for nine years. Allie has an undergraduate degree in nutrition. She was unsure what jobs to pursue in her field of study. After having taken one education class for her program of study, she decided to look into ways to become a teacher. She decided to pursue teaching through an alternative certification program, Teach for America (TFA), where she was able to simultaneously work on a master's degree in education while teaching. After her first three years teaching in Phoenix, she took a six-year break and moved to Chicago where she was able to use her experience and work in education-related positions and at a charter school.

She returned to Phoenix, and on the recommendation of a friend from TFA, she decided to take a position in the third grade at Desert Central School where she stayed for two years. Drawn to the reputation and targeted professional development touted by a neighboring school district, she left Desert Central School for a third-grade position in that district. She left this position after one year because philosophical challenges she had with her school administration's focus on data. After working as a bartender for a year, she returned to Desert Central School because she missed the challenge and the respectability of the teaching profession.

Sara. Sara is currently a teacher in second grade at Desert Central School and has taught the same grade there for four years. Sara started her undergraduate degree in business but after a couple of years felt that she wanted to do something to help people and switched her major to education. Her first teaching position was at a Title 1 charter school where she taught second grade for three years. She enjoyed teaching at the school but felt there were often changes in the vision and purpose at the school. She also

struggled with classroom management, and she thought the professional development offered through the school did not meet her needs. She perceived she was being criticized for these challenges, but she also felt that she was not getting support through coaching or professional development to improve. For these reasons, she decided to try teaching in a traditional public school to see if there would be more professional support, which is how she came to teach at Desert Central School.

Carla. Carla is currently a special area teacher at Desert Central School. (Special area teachers specialize in a content area such as physical education, art, technology, or music). She received her B.A. in education, has been a teacher at Desert Central School for the past 19 years, and has been in the district for over 20 years. She is highly committed to teaching and, in particular, to teaching in a school with a large Latinx population. She is empathetic to the challenges many of the Latinx families experience in this country and this motivates her to teach in Title 1 schools.

Samantha. Samantha has seven years of teaching experience. Three of those years she taught in charter schools in a different state. She has been a second-grade teacher in Desert Central School for the past four years. She has a B.A. in education, but joined Teach for America because she was drawn to not only the organization's mission, but also to the amount of extra support they were known to provide their corps members while in their first years of teaching. She had an idea of how difficult the first years of teaching could be and felt it would be beneficial to have the extra support.

In her previous two schools, she had contrasting experiences and it was in the second school where she felt she understood that a strong vision and clear systems and

clearly communicated expectations established by the school administration could make a difference at a school. When she came to Phoenix, she was looking for a school with these features. She interviewed at several schools and asked during her interview about support and expectations. She wanted to ensure she connected with the administrators at her school and that the school's administrators knew what they wanted from a teacher from the interview.

Meghan. Currently a special area teacher at Desert Central School, she has been teaching at the school for seven years, three of those years in this position, and first four years in a kindergarten position. Prior to teaching at the school, she was a teacher in a neighboring state where she taught pre-kindergarten for three years. Meghan has an undergraduate degree in education, and she has worked in Title 1 schools for her entire career. In her personal life, she is very motivated by the content area she teaches and has a related small business on the side. She is very passionate about what this content brings to her own life and she feels strongly about teaching her students and others about what it can bring to their lives. Additionally, Meghan was raised in circumstances similar to those of her students and is very committed to helping other teachers understand the challenges these students face in school:

I grew up in an environment where we didn't have food every day, or clean clothes. We had to stay home from school because we were babysitting each other. Babies taking care of babies, you know? And so, because I know what that's like, these kids are very relatable to me... So, certain things that I think that, you know, not to offend anybody or anything like that, but I think a lot of teachers who don't experience that, they don't understand it. And to them, it's like, oh, my gosh, he has lice, or he has bedbugs. And I'm like, we had that all the time ... I don't want it now as an adult, but I know what it's like to have people go like, whoa, you have lice.... It affects your learning. You don't want to come to school when people are making fun of your clothes, or your hair and stuff like that. So,

anyway ... just being as supportive as I can to other people who don't come from that kind of a background, it made me feel like a good resource for them...

Sheila. When I interviewed her, Sheila was working as a concierge at a realty company. She received an undergraduate degree in education from ASU and has a little over 13 years of teaching experience. She taught for about two years in a Title 1 school in south Phoenix. She left that position and took a break from teaching for five years before returning to teach at this school for 11 years. She has taught multiple grade levels from kindergarten to sixth grade as well as a special area position. She left Desert Central School in 2016.

Sheila was motivated to work in Title 1 schools to make a positive difference in the lives of students living in under-privileged circumstances. Her first position was in a very high needs district that struggled to support the needs of the students. She struggled with the lack of resources, and support from the school and district.

She also felt that the needs for the students and their families at her school were very intense. She recounted that she had students with extreme behavioral issues and had little support to manage them. To demonstrate the challenges the families faced, she described a drug-addicted mom who regularly volunteered in her classroom just to get off the streets and away from drugs. Without an aide or support from school, and as a young person figuring out how to be an adult herself, she felt an overwhelming amount of pressure while teaching at this school. She ultimately left and went into sales. At the time, she really did not think that she would ever return to teaching.

After a five-year break from teaching she decided she wanted to make a positive societal contribution and a position that offered more stability than one that depended

upon commissions, she decided to try teaching again. She wanted to work in a community where she could make a positive impact, but was very careful to choose a school that she thought had resources, systems, and structures, and where she felt a connection with the administrator. She found that at Desert Central School and taught in a variety of positions for the next 11 years.

District Data

As a part of this study, I also looked at the school district exit data as a comparison. I used the data from the 2017-18 school year. In this year there were 80 teachers that had a minimum of 3 years teaching experience that chose to separate from the district either through retirement or resignation. I filtered the data and looked at the number of years they worked in the district prior to separating. Additionally, I also looked to see if they were a rehire, indicating that they had worked in the district before and had returned at some point. My intent was to use this information to compare responses from the interviewees about retention and attrition with actual data from teachers who have chosen to leave the school district.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

In this chapter I will review and analyze the interview data to determine trends and patterns that may be associated with teacher retention and attrition. I will also conduct a cross categorical analysis between the teachers by creating composite profiles based upon common traits two or more of the teachers may have in common. This process provided insights into what might influence different groups of teachers to stay or leave a school. Finally, I will compare the results from this analysis to district level teacher retention and attrition data from 2018, the school year prior to when these interviews took place, by analyzing the retention and attrition of teachers in the district with similar demographic characteristics as the teachers in the composite profiles.

Analysis of Interview Data

While the interview questions were loosely aligned to factors that influence teacher attrition and retention as outlined in the literature review, the conversational nature of the interview helped provide more nuanced insights into how these factors, and combinations of these factors, shaped the teachers' reasons for staying, leaving, or returning to the school. The discussion also surfaced other factors that influenced their decisions beyond the primary factors initially discussed.

In analyzing the responses to these questions, it was clear that there were many factors that continued to arise and were influential in a teacher's decision to stay or leave a school or a district, but these factors were not confined to just one theme. For example, school administration, which many studies have indicated is a major contributing factor

in teacher retention and attrition, was mentioned throughout the teachers' responses; however it was mentioned in conjunction with many different topics, such as vision and mission, teacher autonomy, professional development, and school discipline, making it difficult to isolate it as a stand-alone influence.

The first questions primarily focused on the teachers' pathway to becoming educators, their professional experience, and their teaching positions. I felt this was important information to gather as research has shown that variations in pathways to becoming teachers can influence teacher retention in the long term (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004). The following table represents shows the participants' current or most recent teaching position, years of teaching experience, and the certification process of the participants in each category. The teachers interviewed represented both general education classrooms, and special area content classrooms. While not represented in this table, both special area teachers had previously taught in general education classrooms before becoming special area teachers at various grade levels from kindergarten to sixth grade.

Table 2*Participants*

	Position	# of years at the school	# of years teaching experience	# of transitions	Credentials
Current Teacher	Kindergarten	6	18	2 schools 2 grades	Traditional
	2 nd grade	4	7	3 schools 2 grades	Traditional **
	2 nd grade	4	7	2 schools 1 grade	Traditional
	Physical Education	19	22	2 schools 1 content	Traditional
Returning Teacher	5 th grade	3.5	9	4 schools (one school twice) 4 positions	Alternative
	Special area	7	14	2 schools 4 positions	Traditional
Former Teacher	Special area	11.5	13	2 schools 5 positions	Traditional

** While this teacher held an undergraduate education degree, she also joined TFA

Experience and Background

Teaching Experience. All the teachers I interviewed had teaching experience prior to teaching at Desert Central School. At the low end, one teacher had two and a half

years of teaching experience, and on the high end, one teacher had 12 years of experience teaching other schools. At the time of this interview, all these teachers had taught at Desert Central School for three or more years in addition to any prior teaching experience they had. Three teachers were in their fourth year of teaching at the school at the time of the interviews. One of these teachers did not complete that year of teaching at the school, so she represented the low end of years teaching at the school at three and a half years. On the high end, one teacher had come to the school from another school in the district the very first year the school was opened had been teaching there for 19 years at the time of the interview. In general, the group of teachers I interviewed had more teaching experience than the teaching staff at Desert Central School as a whole, and they had taught an average of eight years at this school with the median being six years.

By sorting the interviewees into subgroups based upon years of teaching experience both in and out of Desert Central School, I was able to gain further insights. Five of the seven participating teachers had moved schools or districts only once prior to coming to this school. Of the two teachers who had changed schools more than once, one was forced to move to a new school when there was a reduction in force due to enrollment. She was affiliated with a teaching placement agency, and they moved her to a similar charter school. The other teacher had taught in several schools across the country. She too was affiliated with the same teacher placement agency and would work with that agency when relocating to new locations.

Another interesting pattern related to teacher experience is in the number of position changes. All the currently employed teachers have either stayed in the same

grade level or content area or made only one change, even when changing schools. In contrast the returning teachers had made four grade level or content transitions, and the teacher who left the profession had made five. The current teachers have a higher average number of both years teaching and years teaching in the school, which suggests that there may be a relationship between the number of transitions in schools and positions over time and teacher retention.

Pathways to Teaching and Credentialing. Six of the seven teachers I interviewed received their education degrees through an undergraduate program resulting in an education degree. Three of those teachers got a degree from Arizona State University, two received their degree from four-year degree programs at universities in other states, and one teacher received her degree from a university in Mexico. A current kindergarten teacher pursued her degree later in life after her children had grown, but she went through a traditional program and received her B.A. in education so while her timeline may not be considered traditional, her pathway to credentialing was traditional. Also, a second grade teacher who received her degree out of state participated in Teach for America even though she had her degree in education, which is unique for this program, as this program is usually used as an alternative pathway to teacher certification. While this teacher was attracted to mission of the organization and the ongoing support over the first two years of teaching, her pathway could be considered traditional as she has a B.A. in education. One of the seven teachers participating in this study received her teaching credentials through Teach for America which allowed her to teach on an intern certificate while simultaneously getting a master's degree from ASU.

This would be considered an alternative pathway because she already had a B.S. in nutrition sciences and was able to begin teaching without an education degree or experience.

In summary, research indicated that teachers who came to teaching through an alternative certification pathway were more likely than traditionally certified teachers to stay in teaching (Sutcher et al., 2016). In this study, the lone alternative pathway teacher, while having been a teacher for more than 9 years had left teaching at least two times over the course of her professional career to explore other options. While she has not left the profession completely, she does have the least commitment to the profession relative to the other teachers in the study who came to teaching through traditional programs. Furthermore, this teacher, along with the one teacher who left teaching altogether, both have similar pattern of changing positions over the course of their careers. Compared to the other teachers in the study, they changed positions twice as often as the current teachers over similar periods of time.

Teacher Retention and Attrition Factors

Throughout the interviews, the participants' responses addressed the major issues influencing retention and attrition that are well-documented in the research literature, but they were also nuanced in that the sense that there were many factors that crosscut several areas. For example, the relationship a teacher has with her school administration was identified as a very important factor in school retention and attrition in the literature review, and it also came up multiple times in all the participants' interviews. However, the interviewees rarely discussed this as a factor on its own, rather, they brought it up in

the context of discussing other issues such as school selection, professional development, and working conditions. To gain a better understanding of what these participants found important, I needed a way to make sense of how these factors were interconnected and what role these interconnections play, if any, in teacher retention and attrition. To do that, I chose to identify commonalities among the participants based upon their responses and created composite profiles with the intention of surfacing patterns of behavior or driving factors that seem to motivate teachers to stay or leave a school.

Cross-Case Comparison

To compile the composite profiles, I used a matrix to find similarities across the responses of all the interviewees. The matrix listed categories of the factors identified in the literature review, which corresponded to the teachers' responses from the interviews. Through this process I was able to sort nearly all the teachers into three different profiles: Ms. Kindred, Ms. Harmony, and Ms. Waver. Interestingly within each profile, the teachers' perspectives about the factors identified in the literature review tended to align; however, the strongest points of alignment were in their experience, career pathways, and age. All but one of the interviewees fit neatly into a profile. For that teacher there was alignment in nearly all aspects for the Ms. Waver profile, and I address the area where there was not a clear alignment after the composite profile descriptions, and what that may suggest separately. Additionally, I use quotations from all the teachers in the corresponding group to support my discussion of the identified retention and attrition factors. Finally, I gave them a pseudonym that represented why and how they felt about

teaching and teaching at Desert Central school. The three composite profiles we identified were as follows:

Ms. Kindred: Has taught for less than ten years and is happy to stay if there is a strong connection to the school and its community. On a personal level, she is also in the early stages of meeting societally defined adult milestones, such as being in a committed relationship, homeownership, and having children. Ms. Kindred would be considered a millennial, reaching young adulthood in the early 21st century. Her life has been heavily influenced by rapid technological advancements and social media.

Ms. Harmony: Has taught for more than 20 years and while she is planning on retirement in the next few years, she is motivated to stay at her school by being a part of and contributing toward a strong school community. On a personal level, she has reached all the adult milestones and her children are grown. Ms. Harmony is part of the baby boomer generation and has been through many changes in education, especially with policies and technology.

Ms. Waver: Has taught for several years, off and on. Ms. Waver is in the middle of her career and has many years of experience behind her, but still many years left before she can retire. On a personal level, she also exists in a grey area, as she has hit some adult milestones and is still trying to establish others. While she is not a millennial, nor is she a baby boomer, she is somewhere in the x or y generations, making her old enough to have experienced sweeping changes in education and technology. Additionally, this also means her young adulthood has

been marked by significant events like 9/11 and the 2008 recession. She seems to be conflicted about her desire to continue to work in the education field and has left the profession or tried to leave the profession and returned.

Composite Teacher Profiles

Ms. Kindred.

Teaching Experience and Career Pathway. Ms. Kindred has been a primary teacher at Desert Central School for three years. She came to the school with three years of teaching experience. While she has her undergraduate degree in elementary education, she started her college career in another field and decided to change to education after coming to the realization that she wanted to do something that she viewed as making a difference and because she liked working with children.

Upon finishing college, she was recruited by and took a primary teaching position with a charter management organization that has many school campuses in urban areas around the country. They placed her in one of their campuses with a high percentage of students who qualify for Title1 funding which aligned with the type of student population Ms. Kindred was hoping to teach.

Overall, Ms. Kindred had a positive experience at the school. The culture was positive, and she personally connected with the other teachers she worked with in her grade level and at the school. However, over the three years she was there, she was dissatisfied with the inconsistency of professional expectations.

I liked my team, and I got along really well with them, but as a whole school it was more like ... Everyone was kind of on their own agenda. Trying to figure out their own thing.

I started off in second grade and I really loved that school. There was a really good culture there, very creative teachers surrounding me, so that was neat, however, I did feel a bit overwhelmed with the amount of times they [the administration] would change purpose of what they wanted us to be working on.

As expectations and demands placed on teachers changed, Ms. Kindred also began to feel frustration with the level of support she was receiving, especially in the areas of professional development and coaching.

With professional development I never felt it was very strong there, especially as someone who felt I always struggled with classroom management. Being there and not having this strong backing from a coach, I felt like I was getting criticized but not helped in the way that I needed. Even though I had strong teachers to look at, I wasn't actually going in to really look at them or getting much help.

Ms. Kindred still loved teaching and wanted to continue to stay in the profession even though she was feeling some professional frustration. When she was presented with a personal opportunity to move, she decided it was also a good time to make a professional change and decided to look for a position with a school district.

Employment Preferences. When Ms. Kindred began interviewing for a new teaching position, she was aware of what she was looking for in her interviews with school administrators based upon her previous experience. In particular, she was looking for signs of a positive school climate and culture, evidence of systems and structures, connection with the school's administration, articulation of a clear vision and expectations. She interviewed at multiple schools and had questions prepared to elicit responses from the interviewees.

To discern the school's climate and culture, Ms. Kindred had specific questions to guide her, but she also felt it was important that there was a positive connection

between her and the interviewers and described looking for that element in the interview process.

If I think about it, I guess, I'm mainly looking for a culture of positivity, because I go into an interview hoping that the person that I am speaking with is having a conversation with me rather than just asking me questions.

At another school (where she interviewed), they were like, "Oh we work with refugee children." I was like, "Oh, I really like that." That's definitely near and dear to my heart. But that interview was very businesslike. Question answer. Question answer. Question answer. I was like, "I will dutifully answer all of these questions." But there's no laughter, no fun. Versus like when I interviewed at [Desert Central School] with you it was like ... I walked away and I was like, "I don't know what I revealed about my teaching ability." I felt like we were just sharing ideas as colleagues... When I was talking to my roommate she was like, "You know, it does seem like one school is a little bit more communal, community oriented than the other. You're moving states. You're gonna want people around you that you can enjoy being with." I was like, "Yes. That is what I'm looking for." Oddly enough, none of that has to do with actually teaching, curriculum. Nothing. It was just like, "Do I like hanging out with these people?" I spend hours in this building and at school. I spend more hours than most people do in this building. I wanna make sure that when I see people I actually want to see them.

While it was important for the connections with future colleagues and school leaders to be positive, it seems that for Ms. Kindred, it was equally important that there was a professional alignment between her philosophy and expectations and the school's as well. Reflecting about her interview with Desert Central School, she stated the following:

I automatically felt the connection in the interview with you as a person. I felt like I was going to be valued from the get-go because you asked me some questions about how I teach reading, or how I teach this. I was like, it seems that we agree on a lot of the things, on a lot of the strategies to teach, so, I don't know. I was excited.

Based upon her previous experience, Ms. Kindred wanted to teach at a school that had evidence of clear structures and systems. In particular, she wanted to have clear systems around student discipline and teacher support and expectations.

There are some things I definitely asked about and was curious about. Some of which is like, what's your behavior system, your discipline system? What kind of a system do you expect out of your teachers? I would always ask that question during my interviews, and I just wanted to make sure that the administrators had an idea. You do have an idea what you wanted me to do in my classroom, right? Then I'm also a very stickler for rules and for appropriate consequences in my classroom, and I wanted to hear that I would be supported in that, and the administrators wouldn't be like, "Oh, well I mean, like so-and-so is just trying. So just let him or her back in your classroom." I would not have been okay with that.

In addition to clear systems and structures, Ms. Kindred placed an equal emphasis on the administrator's ability to articulate a clear vision and expectations which she felt was lacking in her previous experience. She wanted to be sure that school leaders could ensure consistency and a systematic way of following through with these elements. Knowing this, she actively sought it out in her interviews and ultimately it was the reason she chose Desert Central School over another school in the same district.

You guys were very clear about what you wanted and what resources you were providing for your teachers. You guys were like, "Well, we have this, and we have this, and we have this, but you can also come up with your own stuff." It was like, like a smorgasbord of ideas. Then you were like, "Oh, we have planning meetings and we do this, and we do that." You just seemed like you knew what was going on. Then at the other school it was more like, "Well, we have a bunch of stuff you can choose from." I was like, "Okay. What kind of stuff?" They were like, "Well, there's a bunch of curricular, and then we have the district curriculum, and we'll probably meet, maybe plan about it, but really it's up to you." I was just like, "Mmmm." I don't know. It's too much choice for me. It definitely was more like ... The feel that I was getting from you guys was like you knew what you wanted us to look at, but you were okay with giving us some leeway, versus the other school was like, "Well, just here. Pick." It's not like they had a preference or anything.

Overall, the administrator's ability to articulate the elements Ms. Kindred was looking for created a connection to her professional beliefs about education. Ultimately, she was looking for a school where she connected with the overall philosophy, the logistics, and her potential colleagues. This is evident in her desire for articulation of expectations and vision, as well as a personal and professional connection. This reflection furthers highlights the importance of connections for Ms. Kindred.

It was very clear to see that he [previous supervisor] knew what he wanted out of his school. He was very passionate about it. And he also asked me things about myself. It wasn't all business. He wasn't just asking about, "What's your behavior system? How do you teach centers? How do you communicate with parents?" He also randomly asked, "I just want to know what you do for fun?" I was like, "Oh, I never answered that question in an interview before. Cool." Then that leads to conversation that helps you connect.

Climate and Culture. Ms. Kindred has worked at her current school and in the same grade level for the past four years. Her feelings of connection with her grade level team, administration, and the staff in general has continued to play a part in why she chooses to stay at the school.

Overwhelmingly, Ms. Kindred values the support and connections she has with her team that functions on two levels, a collegial connection and a professional connection. Collegiality refers to the comradery amongst the team members and the emotional and social support they provide one another. This positive team culture is important for Ms. Kindred because she believes it helps her to stay grounded and helps her to function better within the school. This was especially evident when she first came to the school and is a factor in why she chose to return.

Everybody is positive and supportive here. And then, of course, it helps to have a team that is functioning so well, and very strong teachers on the team to help me feel the layout of the school.

Professional connection goes beyond positive support and encouragement. It extends to the work ethic of the team members and an alignment of professional values and educational philosophies among teachers in the school. This connection is important to Ms. Kindred because it provides her not only the support she needs to function effectively in her position, but it also provides a way for to learn and grow within her field.

I feel like I'm super supported. I love our team planning meetings. I feel like even as somebody who had taught for three years before I came to Desert Central School, I was like, "Oh, that's a new way I could see that standard," or just being able to sit and listen to my teammates come up with ideas, or tweak an idea. It's always so important to be willing to listen to people instead of being really focused on just doing things.

Additionally, Ms. Kindred finds both collegial and professional connections are important because she is committed to working in an inner-city, Title 1 school. The support she gets from her team and professional community provide her not only with the skills needed to do her job, but also connect her with other like-minded individuals who are trying to make a difference in a challenging situation.

I love hanging out with you guys. I'm also the kind of person where I'm like, one, I chose to work at an inner-city Title I school, so any of the challenges that arise because I chose to work at such a school, it's like, "Well, duh, [Ms. Kindred]. What did you expect?" I'm not gonna complain about something when I went into this fully knowing... I've made so many friends here, there is a very big community factor... The challenges that I meet are the challenges that I signed up for. I know that I've got people here that support me and have my back if I need you guys.

School Administration. As was referenced earlier, having a connection with the school administration is also important for Ms. Kindred. She values being able to approach the administration for support as well as collegially. She has a high level of confidence in her abilities to act independently in her classroom, and has strong opinions about expectations for herself; therefore, she is looking for an administrator who will follow through when she asks for support and someone who she views as a collaborator with whom she can have a professional discourse.

One of the things that you do and that the assistant principal does, I guess, is that you're always ready for us to approach you with any kind of problem that we have, so I don't ever feel bad about coming to talk to you. You're not only advising us on how to be better teachers, but you really help us with problem-solving when you have that open door feeling, so that's something that's been helpful.

Interestingly, because Ms. Kindred is able clearly articulate her personal philosophy about education and believes in her own instructional abilities, one might think she would be reluctant to get feedback from her administration. However, she actually values differentiation in her administration's support of teachers. She wants to be listened to and given support, but she also appreciates receiving feedback if it is provided in a respectful and collegial way.

I feel like you guys really understand who we are as people, and you try to respond accordingly. So, you try to figure out what it is we need you to be, and you try to fill that role. I really appreciate that. You guys are always willing to talk about students with me. Even if I drop by, I'm like, "Hey, let me just run this by you. Does it even make sense for me to assume this or go in this direction?" And you're always willing to do that. At the same time, you're never too ... you don't shy away from being like, "No, [Ms. Kindred], that's probably not the best thing for you to do. Maybe do this instead," but you do it in such a respectful and friendly manner where I don't feel like you're like, "Nope, do it this way." You're willing to listen to me and think about what I'm saying, and then come back and be like, "Well, let's take it in this direction," or you give me something else to try.

Finally, another point where Ms. Kindred wants to connect with her school administration is in a shared commitment to working with this specific demographic. Even though she finds it challenging at times, she is willing to work in a Title I school if her school administration believes in the same mission and is willing to work collaboratively to support the students.

You know like I don't think I've ever seen you or the Assistant Principal like give up on a kid. Where you're like "Oh this kid is such a headache!"-... "Like I'm just done with him!" I know I've said that where I'm just so frustrated like "Uh, somebody fix this!" But you guys are always like "You know, let's take a day and think what might help with ... Let's try this. Let's try that." And I know I appreciate that because I guess like sometimes, I do get to the end of my rope and I'm like I just, I just don't know. I've used up all of my tools in my toolbox

Philosophy and Mission. Ms. Kindred values the communal connection the entire school shares in the work that is done for the students.

Everybody seems equally invested in their kids, and everyone seems to understand the idea that it takes a village. It's not just us working in our classrooms or working with our teams, it's across the board. K through eighth grade, all administrators, and all the support staff down to the cafeteria workers, we're so invested in our kids.

Not only is this shared commitment to making a difference in the lives of her students is important to Ms. Kindred, it is how it is translated into the culture of the schools and how the employees interact with one another to work toward this shared vision that is important.

Professional Development (Mentoring/Coaching). Ms. Kindred finds professional learning and growth valuable especially because she is so committed to her students. She wants to be an effective teacher for her students because wants to make a

difference in their lives; therefore, she strives to improve even when it may put her outside her own comfort zone.

Well, I guess I just really liked teaching. It was one of those things where after a couple of months I was like, I'm actually not too bad at this, and I kind of like it, even though it's a lot of work. I've always liked school, so it's a continuation of going to school. But I'm also one of those people who when I do something and I like it I'm gonna keep at it, because I wanna keep improving at it. I'm not satisfied with, "I guess that works."

Having high expectations for herself, Ms. Kindred is open to different types of feedback and support. She is more interested in collegial types of support, rather than general, whole group trainings or professional development opportunities. She would rather receive immediate feedback or support, even if she finds it uncomfortable, especially if it helps her improve.

I've always felt like I have grown significantly every year. Whether that's just and making sure I understand the content I am teaching or just the way to scaffold it, and I felt very supported in my first year. I felt a bit overwhelmed at how much I was observed, because that's just my nature, but it ended up benefiting me so much. I felt like my classroom management grew in leaps and bounds just in my first year here, and I was like, "Okay, this is what teaching is. I am getting through to these kids. I feel so much better."

An example of the collegial professional development and support Ms. Kindred has received comes from her instructional coach at the school. She finds this type of support to be valuable because it addresses her immediate needs. In particular, she really enjoys the professional support she gets from collegial coaching sessions. These are sessions where a coach helps teachers plan for colleagues to come and observe a targeted instructional strategy. Afterwards, there is a debrief opportunity facilitated by the instructional coach, where the teacher receives constructive feedback from her peers.

I think a lot of the things that I've been a part of have been helpful, and again that's my peers coming in to observe me, [teaching] things that I'm uncomfortable with, but I wouldn't replace that experience with anything. It's wonderful. I just get a lot of feedback.

Additionally, Ms. Kindred and her grade level teammates meet and collaborate regularly with their instructional coaches in weekly planning meetings. She perceives this as an additional way to learn and grow professionally and values the collaboration and how it benefits her students, as they need it.

They've [grade level colleagues] helped me understand that standards a little better, so just break down what it is within the standard that I should be teaching for my kids ... will actually understand it. I really appreciate that you guys emphasize that time so strongly.

While Ms. Kindred expresses a preference for differentiated professional development, in general, Ms. Kindred is very rational about the need for professional development for all teachers. She values the intention behind training teachers but recognizes the context within which schools and district must function to provide quality professional development to all their staff.

The intent is good to provide the information that people need. I think partly I wish there was a little bit more differentiation, but realistically I don't know how that would work out. For example, my co-team leader and I were talking about how one of our new second grade teachers is brand new to the teaching profession, and we were like, "Wow, you know, she had PD for, what, like seven days before school starts?" Let's be honest, seven days is not even close to being slightly enough to have you feel ready. Why does that happen? Well, funding is an issue, personnel is an issue, all of those things. It's not ... realistically I don't know what we could do about that that's different.

Challenges. In the spring 2018, the school year prior to this interview, teachers across Arizona participated in the Red for Ed movement. This movement utilized social media and mobilized teachers to bring attention to the funding issues in education. This

culminated in a multiday teacher strike that affected schools and families across the city. Many teachers from this school, including Ms. Kindred participated in the Red for Ed movement. She was both motivated by the mission as she feels frustrated by teacher pay and the lack of respect that she feels teachers receive as evidenced by alternative certification pathways, but she also was somewhat conflicted as it clashed with her commitment to teaching her students.

I guess, if I could change one thing, I would like to make more money. I feel like the society appreciates what I do, and I feel it sometimes from some parents and from some of my family members and friends, but just as a larger community, our state is not very supportive of us. That is something I would like to change. I also feel a part of it is that teachers ... One thing that frustrates me lately is that if a teacher comes into a position like this, and they have no previous teaching experience, have not been into a classroom, our state, by allowing that, I think has brought some very interesting people into the classroom. It's not necessarily that they would do a bad job, it's that they come in and they won't do a good job their first year, not because of them but because they don't have the training to understand the classroom, and they haven't seen it at all.

She goes on to explain the conflict she feels with her advocacy, but in reality, she sees her position as a teacher being an even bigger piece of that conversation in the long run, because she has the students now, and she would rather take advantage of shaping their minds now so they can be better informed in the future.

I feel like I'm very much a person who is like ... You know my classroom, my school, like those are within my locus of control. Like government, politics, like people not understanding what it means to be a teacher is a little bit further outside of our locus of control? I think, if anything, the past year has taught us that you know like we can make a difference in our government but that's also not the job that I signed up for. I signed up to be a teacher in the classroom, working in a classroom and in a school to create a place where you know students can learn and feel valued and loved and supported. And I can do what I can as a citizen, but at the end of the day like this is where my energy is going to go. And if people outside of my locus of control are going to not do their research and not try and understand what it is we do then I'm going to try and make sure these kids do. You know?-. And make sure my friends do it. And you know like what is it

that I can affect like ... I don't have time or the energy to be spending like hours and hours like down at Capitol or writing people like-... And we did, right? But like at the end of the day like if I spent all of my time doing that then I would be doing my kids a disservice. And that's not okay with me so ... But yeah I mean like, I don't know, I feel like teachers are always in need and we can't always ... We can't just like give up-... because people who aren't in education don't get what we do. You know there are always going to be people who don't get what we do. And if we let that affect how much we love our job or like how dedicated we are then, you know then we're not doing the job that we signed up for.

In general, Ms. Kindred, does not want to leave the school. She feels connected to her students, their families, and the staff's mission. While she may have small frustrations, such as the staple function on the copier not working or the lack of parent involvement, overall, she tries not to let things outside of her control bother her, because she made the decision to work in Title 1 school. Overall, she is very happy here, but says that there are only two reasons why she would change schools. The first would be a life change. She is recently married, and she said that her husband may want to move to another state. A second reason would be if the culture of the school, in terms of administrative support or discipline, changed.

I think that like if I were at any school, the reason that I would leave a school might be like the culture of the school... People don't always get along and that's not a problem, like you don't need to make everyone like everyone that they're working with? But I think there's something to say about like how that is addressed as a school... if there wasn't like support in like the behavior aspect from the administration. You know when I call for someone to come and remove a child you know I'm not playing around like I need this kid removed... So you know things like that, like if I didn't feel supported by my administration in like behavior but also like in like creating that school culture that like we can like all be okay with each other in? I think those would be like two of the biggest reasons why I would consider leaving a school.

Interview Process. Ms. Kindred seemed very comfortable speaking with me. Her interview was conversational, and she felt comfortable stopping me to go back to address

something or to clarify. She did not seem to hesitate to bring up something that could be perceived as negative or constructive. She also stated that she felt comfortable speaking with me, however, she emphasized that it was our relationship that made her feel more comfortable speaking with me.

I was a little bit nervous. I was like I don't really know what you're going to ask me... but like I said before, I feel like we've built a really good relationship and I've never felt like judged or like criticized by you. So, I feel very able to just like be open with you.

When asked whether or not she thought this would be a good process for administrators to use to get feedback from their teachers to help with teacher retention, she said she felt this would be a good process if it was done regularly and with clear expectations. She also emphasized that it would be important to reiterate that participating in this type of interview would not affect their positions in anyway.

I think it actually would. I think it would be incredibly awkward both for you and probably for the other teacher-... But I think if, you know if it was like a yearly thing or you know every other year sort of thing, I think ... Like you explicitly said like this does not tie in to like your position here or whatever. But I feel like if that wasn't like said, if that wasn't explicitly stated, I think people would feel much more nervous-... about revealing these things to you...but I think that knowing that you want to know where I stand about these things is-... It's like one of those things where I'm like, I feel valued and I feel listened to you know? Where I'm like, I know that you want to do the best that you can because you care about us and you want to keep us here.

Summary. Connection is Ms. Kindred's primary motivation for staying in education and for staying at Desert Central School. She wants to feel a connection with the students she is serving and has a deep conviction to do so. Furthermore, she wants to work with others who have that same passion for working with this student population as it creates a professional connection with her colleagues. She willingly will work above

and beyond in an effort to meet her professional expectations, but she expects that the support and professional development she receives is purposeful and in alignment with meeting her professional goals and needs, which are ultimately meeting the needs of her students. For Ms. Kindred, everything is interconnected, and as long as things are philosophically, professionally, and personally in alignment, she is more than happy to stay.

Ms. Harmony.

Teaching Experience and Career Pathway. Ms. Harmony has been a teacher in the school district for more than 20 years. While she taught at another school in the district prior to coming to Desert Central School, she has taught at this school in the same position for more than ten years. When she started her undergraduate degree, she was not sure if she wanted to be a teacher, but other educators she knew encouraged her to pursue a degree in education. At the time she had school-aged children and she thought it would be a career that she could have while raising them. She went on to study education at her local state university and became a teacher. Since then she has continued to work in the same school district where she started. Throughout the years, she has gained a lot of hands-on experience and training, but she does not hold a master's degree. Ms. Harmony lives near the district and considers herself a member of both the school and local community. She knows many people who work in the district which is how she initially became connected to her first school. She loves teaching and says that she is going to teach until she retires.

Employment Preferences. When asked why she choose to work at Desert Central School and more importantly why she has continued to work there year after year, without hesitation, she says it is the community. When she refers to the community, she means two different things: the local community the school serves which includes the students and their families, and the school community which includes students, families, and school faculty and staff.

Local Community. Ms. Harmony is highly motivated by community service and believes the work she does as a teacher is a calling to serve this community, and this is why she has worked within the district and at this school in particular for so many years. The school she worked at prior to Desert Central School is less than half a mile to the north, so both schools where she has worked in the district serve primarily the same demographic population of students. Additionally, many families move back and forth between the schools while they attend school in this district, and it is not uncommon for them to attend both schools within the same school year. Ultimately, Ms. Harmony feels that her work as an educator must be rooted in service to a community, and for that reason she prioritizes that as an employment factor beyond any other.

I love to work with the Hispanic community. I really like that. I feel like I'm giving back to them. I want the students to feel welcome in this country...Obviously, salary. It's a good salary, competitive with other districts, but it's not the main thing. It helps a lot. But if you let me choose from a school that pays you very well, that I cannot really, I don't feel like I can give, that I'm serving enough. I'd rather it be in a place I can serve a little more, even though I have less money.

Since Ms. Harmony's work with the community is service oriented, her efforts go beyond daily instruction in the classroom. Having taught at the school for many years,

she has not only developed relationships with her students, but she has also developed a connection with their families as well. She values these relationships and feels she can make a positive impact on the interactions the parents have with the school. The effort she puts into cultivating these relationships and her contributions toward the effectiveness of the school as a whole make the work she does meaningful for her.

I think I have a very good relationship with parents. I'm always talking to them and giving them advice and they keep coming to me with questions and I think I can make a little bit of difference with them. Sometimes they're mad and I can calm them down. Sometimes they come with advice too and they tell me, "Teacher, why don't you guys do this and that?" and I bring those concerns to you, things like that.

Ms. Harmony's service to the community transcends simply engaging with her students, their families, and the community. She understands the struggles that many of the families face, and she wants to use her professional platform as a teacher to make a positive impact on the lives of her students and their families. In referring to the many health challenges and the high rate of obesity that is commonly found in communities like that of Desert Central School, she discusses how she feels she is making a difference in the health and wellness of the community.

Because many of our kids these days they are just sitting in the couch, playing video games, or even in recess, you see him sitting there they don't even want to stand and do anything. I don't want them to go through things I've been going through either because I'm overweight, or I'm too old, or I didn't eat right. I want the kids to have a different life. So mainly on the kids because most of them are doing, are moving, are growing. Every time I talk to them and I say just wanted to feel confident that as you're leaving this room, you're better than you were before. At least a little better.

School/Student Community. Since Ms. Harmony's primary motivation for teaching is community, alongside her conviction to serve this population of students, she

feels it is also her responsibility to ensure that she is creating a positive learning environment for her students. Not only is this important to her professionally, she also gains a level of personal satisfaction from creating this community in her classrooms well.

I'm teaching kids. That's exactly, you know, I'm getting 'em ready for (the next) grade. I want them to be good citizens of the world too. Everything I do is important and again I never feel like they're, like what I teach them is gonna be too tricky so they always amaze me with what they can learn so yeah...When they talk about what they've learned. When they use the vocabulary or when they're excited about something they've learned. When I see their parents, their parents tell me about things that they've been learning in school. Again, once you've finally, created that nice community in your classroom, I mean that's big for me. It's just nice for all of us to be in that classroom when you get to that point.

Climate and Culture. While Ms. Harmony's primary motivation for teaching is service to her local community and to teach in schools that serve Title I students, she is also up front about wanting to do so in a school where she likes the people she works with and where that is reciprocated. When asked about why she continues to teach at Desert Central School, she states the following:

Well definitely the community, that's a big one for me. I feel like I'm valuable here, I feel very respected, people are very friendly, like I really like you [referring to the administration]. I like the assistant principal, I just really like everybody here and that really makes all the difference in the world. That is why I feel so dedicated to this school. It's sad when people leave but then it's always fun to get to know the new people too.

In addition to liking the people she works with, Ms. Harmony also wants to be seen as a valued, contributing member of the school community. She wants to be part of the school's failures and successes and seen as an integral part of the team. When reflecting on what is important to her, she emphasizes this point.

[I like] to feel integrated. I really like that I feel that I'm doing something with somebody else in the school. Like I'm part of Desert Central School's success, or part of Desert Central School. Whatever it is. If we're going up or down, I want to be on the train.

One example of this can be seen in how Ms. Harmony collaborates with her team. Over the years, Ms. Harmony has worked on a relatively stable team. While there have been changes among one or two of the members over the years, for the most part, she and another team member have stayed teaching together. They work well together, are able to support one another, and readily mentor any new members that come on board.

I think that people, my team especially, we've had a few that've left but for the most part it's been a staying team. I think what we have now is going to last. I really do. I think that we're, we're kind of positive. We're very positive and we really listen to each other. We take the time to listen to each other. We just, we have really mostly, we have just a lot of fun. It's light and fun but we're serious when we really need to do. Everybody's very supportive and helpful with each other and we're, in many ways, we just make it work.”

Regardless of who comes or goes, Ms. Harmony is willing to do her part in order to maintain the functionality of the micro-community she has with her team.

School Administration. Ms. Harmony really just enjoys working at Desert Central School and cannot imagine working anywhere else. One factor she values is the support and guidance provided by the school administration. There are three reasons why she values a strong school administration: school vision or philosophy, professional respect and autonomy, and individual support.

School Vision and Philosophy. As was mentioned earlier, Ms. Harmony really enjoys the team she works with, and she is saddened when her colleagues leave. To a certain extent, she enjoys working as Desert Central School and has trouble understanding why anyone would leave. This is partly based on the experience she had at

her previous experience. While the majority of her experience at that school was positive, over time, the change in school administration ultimately changed the climate and the philosophy at the school. The decision to leave was a difficult one to make, but ultimately, she did choose to leave.

We did get a new principal and I liked that new principal. I did for several years but other people started to leave and those were the master teachers. Things began to change at that school. The philosophy was changing and changing drastically.

Professional Respect and Autonomy. This experience has shaped what she values in a school administrator, and she is grateful for things other teachers with less experience may not really recognize as being something unique. For example, she tends to appreciate being valued and respected by her administrator as exhibited by the comfort level she has in interacting with her school administrators:

I love the leadership, I feel like I can come to you, and I don't need to call you 'Mrs. Berg', I can call you, Michelle. That's a lot to me. It means a lot to me, because I think you made me get to the point that I feel so confident talking to you, that I can call you by your first name. And the same with the assistant principal, and all that, so, that's a big thing for me.

Ms. Harmony's level of comfort with her administrator is important because she wants to have open communication with her school's administration, but she is respectful of the chain of command and this level of comfort is necessary for her to in order to voice her true opinions and concerns.

I think I have good leadership. I have admin that I know, if I come to you, you guys are going to listen to my concerns. I feel I can talk to them about anything, and it's not going to be taken wrongly. I know that they're also going to listen to my concerns.

Sometimes I know you're too busy. But I don't think I remember a time that you didn't get back to me. I don't remember any issue or concern that is not being addressed by you guys. All the time I get an answer. Sometimes it's the answer that I want and sometimes it's not. (laughs) But I understand that it's not ...

sometimes it's not and that depends and it's not entirely up to you. Sometimes it's the district or with the parent pick-up area, it's the city, so ... I totally understand those things. But I feel that you guys listen to me and try to get back to me every time that it's needed it.”

Ms. Harmony is not necessarily interested in getting the response she wants when she seeks support or assistance from her site administrators; instead she values the openness and accessibility she has with them. She would rather have a collaborative relationship with them, over a positional relationship, but she still has a high regard for the position and wants them to respect her as well. This is evident in her feelings about instructional observations made by site administration.

The community and I feel like you are ... you feel very confident not in only me and my teaching but then the other teachers you're not like always in their classrooms... with the frown on your face.

Like Ms. Kindred, Ms. Harmony wants to have a level of autonomy, not necessarily because she wants to be left alone to do whatever she wants, rather, because she wants her administrators to have a level of professional respect for her and confidence in her abilities. Once again, this reflects her desire to be seen as a contributing member of the school community.

Professional Development. Ms. Harmony really values learning and is always willing to be a part of professional development. For the most part she does not have strong opinions about professional development other than she prefers the trainings she receives from the school rather than those from the district level.

Well, you have to have the professional development, especially when you have a new curriculum which we have now but yeah. I mean it's just a really nice way to keep learning, to keep on top of education and ...I think it's always very relevant to what we're ... I think that, to what we are doing and what we need to do.

Yeah. No, it's nice to be with other grade, with other people in your grade level at different schools. Again, everybody's kinda sharing their ideas and yeah, it is ...I enjoyed, I like being here. I don't like going you know other places but- I don't, but professional development ... That kinda just goes with the-job?

While professional development is not an important reason for Ms. Harmony to stay or leave a school, she clearly prefers training conducted at her site. This is another example of her preference for community and her willingness to do things to support the community rather than because it might be personally beneficial.

Challenges. Ms. Harmony loves working at Desert Central School, and she really does not want to leave or work at another school. That is not to say she does not have frustrations. Most of her frustrations are logistical and easily fixed when communicated. For example, the cleanliness of the school and its facilities is really important to her.

I remember I had, you'd asked me what do you think of the school. I remember that, it was a couple years ago and I said what seems like, it's a little dirty and in the next ... It's been this beautiful campus for the last couple of years. It's like I knew that you had listened.

Interestingly, during this interview, she brought up a frustration she had regarding the schedule. She said, “You know these last five years was really nice. With the new schedule, really, it's anything, it's just this schedule, just I think our lunch comes way too early.”

This was the first time she had ever brought this up. For an administrator it is easier to keep the same schedule year to year if no major curricular or logistical issues come up. All things considered, a schedule change is a reasonable request to be made by a teacher, and can be changed or adjusted easily if needed. However, Ms. Harmony really does not want to be the one to make waves for the community, and therefore is willing to live with certain frustrations rather than voice them.

Ms. Harmony is a rather easy going, and really does not want not want to disrupt the community, so it might be easy to assume that she would only have logistical frustrations, but the reality is, she really values the profession and is frustrated by the lack of respect it gets in society.

It is frustrated (sic), that teachers are not being treated the same way as other professions are, ... It is, because I think most of the professions gives (sic) you enough to give your family a good life, at least with the basics, but I don't think, only with the salary for a teacher, you can actually sustain a family. I'm struggling right now, right? So, yes, I don't think they are actually giving education the importance it deserves, because we are the ones creating all the other professions' positions, and creating doctors, creating lawyers, creating or educating them. So, I really dream of a day that somebody will say, education is one of the most well-paid jobs in US, because we deserve it, not because we just want more money, but because what it really means to be a teacher. The kind of work we're doing is very important. I think it's the most important job that you can have, to be a teacher."

That being said, even though financially teaching is a challenge for Ms. Harmony, at this point in her career, she wants to remain at Desert Central School until she retires.

I don't have a reason to go look for another job. The only reason that will make me look another job, is if financially, I cannot sustain myself for my little family that I have now. I will be forced, and I will, at that point, be devastated if I had to do it like that, cause I'm really happy here at Desert Central School. I feel that you guys care for me. I think that the students care for me too, and I do care deeply for the students, and with the little people that I know here at Desert Central School, and I socialize with, I think they care for me too, and I care for them, and I'm willing to get more friends. But, yeah, I don't think there's a reason for me to want to move.

Interview Process. When asked about the interview process, Ms. Harmony said that overall it was a good experience, but she was nervous and it was a little difficult to get her to expound at times. She said she was nervous and a little uncomfortable with the idea of an interview, but not in speaking with me, as she felt she had a very good relationship with me. She was concerned about saying something wrong, but after a while

she relaxed more, and was able to say that in the end she enjoyed the opportunity to reflect on her career and experiences. When asked if she felt this would be a good process to encourage teacher retention, she said, “Absolutely.”

Summary. As Ms. Harmony comes to the end of her career, it is clear that she wants to be a part of an inclusive community. This is evident in her reasons for working at Desert Central School, where she clearly sees herself as a contributing member of school community. She believes her years of experience and the work that she has done has allowed her to build relationships with the families and students at the school. She values the collegial support she gets from her teammates, fellow teachers, and administration. While both Ms. Kindred and Ms. Harmony may seem very similar, they differ in that Ms. Kindred prioritizes a connection with others based upon alignment with her interests and beliefs. Ms. Harmony, however, is more focused on the relationships she has with others, and more importantly, on maintaining those relationships. These relationships are based upon collaborative and collegial attributes, rather than core values or beliefs. Barring any significant changes in school philosophy or with her financial situations, it is likely Ms. Harmony will remain at Desert Central School until she retires.

Ms. Waver.

Teaching Experience and Career Pathway. Ms. Waver is currently a fifth-grade teacher at Desert Central School. At the time of this interview, this was her second year in the school and in this position, and this was actually the second time she has taught at Desert Central School. She taught here two years prior to her return, for three years. At the time she taught third grade for two years and fourth grade for a year. Prior to coming

to Desert Central School, Ms. Waver had many years of teaching experience in many schools and in a variety of teaching positions.

Ms. Waver has her undergraduate degree in education. She did not start out her undergraduate program in education, but over time decided this would be a good match for what she was looking at for a career.

I wanted to do something where I make a positive difference and I wanted something that offered stability. Recruiting, sales, not always stable. This was a community where I felt I could be impactful, and yet I sensed that it had more things figured out than maybe where I first started.

She graduated from a local university with a degree in Elementary Education. Her first teaching position was at a Title I school where she did her student teaching. Since then she has taught nearly all grade levels kindergarten through sixth grade, and she has taught in four different schools and districts, including one charter school. At one point she also took a six-year break from teaching. During that time, she worked in various jobs in the service and hospitality field, as well as positions in fields related to education.

Employment Preferences. Having taught at many schools, Ms. Waver has specific preferences she is looking for when choosing a school. High among them is working in a Title 1 school. She is motivated by social justice and wants to do something that makes a difference in the lives of others, which is what drew her to education. While she has changed schools several times, working in a Title 1 school is something that has remained constant when choosing a school. She heard about Desert Central School from a friend who was familiar with the school and its vision and mission. Her friend knew about Ms. Waver's desire to make a difference for kids and knowing that her friend

understood this and would recommend this school, was a reason she decided to teach there.

Additionally, Ms. Waver has a strong preference for where she works. She has lived near this area of the city for some time. She has established social circles and hobbies that are important to her and prefers to keep her commute to and from work short. Because a work-life balance is so important to her, location has become a primary factor in choosing a place to work, so much so that the past two school districts she has worked in neighbor one another and are within a few miles from her home.

In past schools, Ms. Waver has had some challenging situations that have resulted in a strong preference for what she looks for in a school environment. Ms. Waver is looking for a positive climate and culture and a connection with the school administration. She commented, “My friend said a lot of great things about it (Desert Central School). Especially about the principal... being very ... Just a warm school environment.” She went on to say, “I wanted a good match with my admin. That was important to me. I sensed that with the principal that hired me, that I was going to get along really well with him. That was very important.”

A major reason for deciding factor for choosing to teacher at Desert Central School was the available resources. At her first school, she worked in a district with very few resources and poor facilities. She felt it hindered her ability to effectively teach students. It was so challenging that it was one of the reasons she took a break from the profession.

It was a tough, tough district. We were impoverished... As an example, there was a teacher who had a grant, and she spent it on paper because there was no paper

for the copy machines. She had a locked cabinet and she would pull paper out, put it in and then when she was done, she would take it out and put it back into her locked cabinet...She was the only teacher who for weeks, and I would even guess months, had paper to make copies for class lessons.

There seemed to be more resources [at Desert Central School]. I remember being very impressed with the library. Walking into that library and realizing that the kids had access to some superb materials, unlike where I had been before. That one was very grounding and helpful to me to know that it was better funded and resourced, that kids were going to benefit from more opportunities.

In comparison to Ms. Kindred and Ms. Harmony, Ms. Waver seemed to have more, and more specific criteria for what she preferred in a school setting.

Climate and Culture. Aside from wanting a warm environment, Ms. Waver really does not specifically mention the working climate and culture of the school being a priority for why she works at the school. While the other teachers perceived climate and culture to be comprehensive and a driving force in how the school functions, Ms. Waver's definition of climate and culture is more one-dimensional in nature and does not necessarily address how it motivates her work at the school.

Last year I feel like we didn't establish a social committee. And like teachers literally, [a teacher] came up to me, this was like, I think in April, and she asked me who [another teacher] was, and I was just like, oh my God, there's something really wrong with our culture this year.

Team Dynamics. Having worked at a lot of schools, Ms. Waver has had a variety of experiences working in teams. These experiences have been both positive and negative. At the time of her interview, she was struggling with the group dynamics on her team and this seemed to be a source of conflict for her. Ms. Waver wants to get along with her team and is willing to collaborate insofar as it improves her effectiveness and more importantly, the efficiency of being able to do her job. She is an effective teacher and does not necessarily see that a highly collaborative team necessarily improves her job

effectiveness, rather she finds it slightly irritating and somewhat counterproductive to being able to do her job.

(I prefer) Somewhere in the middle. Let me know what's happening in your classroom, and if you had a really great lesson. But sometimes I think other teachers need that validation, because you don't get it from your students enough. They're not like, "That was a great lesson, Ms. Waver." So I've also worked with teachers that are constantly telling me the great things happening in their classroom, and sometimes I take it as, "Okay, enough." It comes off more as almost like bragging, in some ways. But I think some people just need that validation.

In general, while a friendly relationship with her teammates enhances her job satisfaction, it is not a reason why she would necessarily stay at a school. However, a negative team experience would definitely be a reason why she would leave a school.

Administration Support. Ms. Waver values support from her administration. As has been the pattern with other employment factors, with her varied experiences, she has had both positive and negative experiences with her administration in the past and this has shaped her support preferences. In her experience, the positive relationships she had with her school administrators were ones where she felt supported both personally and professionally.

I think that there was a high level of responsiveness to needs of (my) room. I think that you [the administration] try to be responsive with scheduling, scheduling needs which are different for special areas versus traditional classrooms and overall, again if there was ever something that was beyond me, I felt comfortable coming to leadership for assistance or support.

I've benefited from excellent leadership all around...you understood work-life balance, it was important in your life and maybe it's being a mother as opposed to being a father too.

Even though professional support is important to Ms. Waver, she wants to be the person who defines what support looks like, and she wants to be the person who solicits

support when she feels she needs it. In the past she has struggled when the support she received was determined by the administrators rather than by her.

I think it was just the administration, the principal there. While she comes out very warm in the interview and everything like that, she was just ... It's all about data and numbers and there wasn't a lot about teaching the whole child. Definitely not a philosophy like project based learning or teaching character skills or character development. Theirs was ... "Time to do that." I just, I honestly it was administration.

I think what I like the most is that if I have a question, and it could be something like I would ask [an instructional coach], I really, I don't understand this math lesson. I didn't feel embarrassed to admit that. I feel like it's a really comfortable place to ask for help when I need it.

When asked about her current administration's level of support, she generally feels positive. When she speaks about the relationship she has with them, it aligns to her preference for autonomy, and she feels she receives the kind of support she is seeking when she asks for it. Administrative support is clearly an important factor for Ms. Waver, but, again, a positive perspective about her administration and their support does not necessarily mean she will stay at a school. However, if she views the support as intrusive, it is likely a factor that could influence her to leave.

Professional Development. Ms. Waver also has conflicting feelings about professional development. Ms. Waver values the learning process especially when it helps with her job effectiveness, to the extent that seeking other professional development options was a reason why she chose to leave Desert Central School the first time and go to another nearby school in another district.

One thing that drew me to the North District was, they talked a lot about targeted professional development. I was looking to grow professionally because, while I really like Desert Central School, I think one thing that keeps us from moving forward with teachers that are veterans is that we have so many new teachers each year. I think it's harder than for some of the experienced teachers to really grow

and learn more about their practice.... I was at an A plus school, so it's like the growth and so I just wanted to know like what do you do to get that growth.

Some of her frustration with professional development at Desert Central School stems from the perceived lack of differentiation. She sees herself as a veteran teacher with a high level of effectiveness and feels that the lack of experience of her fellow colleagues makes the school as a whole less productive, in part, because veteran teachers are held back by their colleagues' inexperience. Furthermore, unlike the other teachers, she does not view collaboration or team planning as a form of professional development. She also has a clear understanding about the areas she wants so to improve in but is not really interested in mandated professional development that are driven by school or district initiatives. She would find professional development opportunities more meaningful if they were more specific, targeted, and differentiated. She acknowledges that there have been attempts to do that, but she has not found the experience as satisfying as she would like.

I think it depends, I've been in some that've really great and then some I think should be more for new teachers....So sometimes I do wish that it was a little bit more targeted towards veteran teachers. I feel like I've done the same guided reading professional development every year. So maybe changing some things up for people. And I think we started doing that. I think it's hard to meet the needs of all the teachers when it's diverse grade levels, experiences and students. So I think it's sometimes good, and sometimes it could be a little bit more targeted. So for example, this year, I honestly don't know how to use a grammar wall. So if we could have some things by choice? So if you want help using iPads and some different programs, or if you need help setting up a grammar wall, maybe if we had choices for some things it would be really useful.

Since a work/life balance is very important to Ms. Waver, the timing of professional development is very important to her as well. When the expectations for professional development conflict with her personal time, this is at odds with her

employment preferences. This combined with a feeling of ineffectiveness was a primary factor in her decision to leave her previous school, even though she had been initially drawn there by its reputation for professional development.

What was challenging there was I thought they were trying to do too many things. We would have trainings on Kagan things, and then they'd have to come in our rooms to observe us doing Kagan. We'd have Saturday professional developments, unpaid, about thinking maps. And so then they had to come in and see how we were using thinking maps. Then we'd have a professional development on how to use ... I forget the type of vocabulary structure. It's named after someone's name. So we would have to then use that. There were so many pieces, and I felt like I was doing a lot of new things, but I wasn't doing any of them well. I felt really overwhelmed by it.

Working Conditions. Ms. Waver expresses the most concerns about working conditions. While she does not necessarily state that they are a reason why she would stay or leave, they are clearly issues she cares about and feels they impact her ability to be effective in the classroom, thus, clouding her experience. Among these concerns are class size, time, and resources.

Class Size. Ms. Waver has concerns about the size of her class at Desert Central School. She did not necessarily state that it was too large in her interview; however, she references how that barrier had been taken away for her in previous experiences allowing her to focus more on her instruction. She said, "I had classes with smaller, I never had more than 25 students my first year so that took a bit, away a huge challenge that has happened later through teaching."

Time. This is major factor in job satisfaction for Ms. Waver. She is very intentional about maintaining a healthy work-life balance, and her professional satisfaction depends heavily upon whether or not her job impedes her personal life. This is not to say she does not have a strong work ethic or sense of professionalism. On the

contrary, she views herself as highly professional, and thus is intentional about using her time efficiently and effectively at work so that she can have balance. She references experiences where those structures made planning and professional development more effective and efficient.

At this school where I previously worked, they would bring in a sub twice a year, and they would be with certain grade levels for the whole morning. We would meet with a coach, we'd have the whole morning with a sub in our room to really talk and plan out the whole quarter. That was really helpful.

In my prior teaching experience, they'd had the meetings in the mornings. Although sometimes there were stragglers who came in, and that was a little bit disruptive, I always felt like that would have been a better way to go because then you have all that day to practice what you had just been taught as opposed to you're exhausted. On a Wednesday afternoon, you are cycling through the same material, but just faster. It's exhausting. Then it's just the end of the day and you may not have eaten and you're just tired....It's just natural if you don't have an opportunity to employ and practice things really swiftly that there's going to be a lower retention rate.

Resources. As we mentioned earlier, at the start of her career, Ms. Waver had worked in a school with very few resources, and this has been something that really has stuck with her over the years. As a Title 1 school, Desert Central School has federal funding sources to assist with the purchase of resources to assist with instructing students who come from a low socio-economic background. The amount of funding received depends upon the percentage of students in the school who meet the parameters for this funding. More than 95% of students who attend Desert Central School meet this definition. Ms. Waver voiced concerns with the amount of resources teachers had available to them, because in comparison to the school where she had first started teaching, it was overwhelming. From her perspective, she felt the money could have been spent on more personnel rather than resources.

Sometimes I found it difficult to understand why so much money was spent on additional resources and materials and time spent on, and maybe it's just above my pay grade, but I found it challenging to understand how we had significant need for more staff, for example, and yet we're spending crazy money on resources that we can now find online.

She recognizes there are funding restrictions and that puts a restraint on how money can be spent, but she feels that it is a barrier to doing what they need to for the students and the school.

I know that there's buckets, but find a way to move the buckets then because this doesn't make sense. There's so many great resources and isn't that a large part why we spend summers developing curriculum and finding these resources? Let's all get together and figure this out...I can't see why we need 30 books in the classroom when the other ones aren't being used because there are other excellent materials that are preferred and more comfortable and less cumbersome and yeah, that was definitely something that I found beyond me.

Challenges. While Ms. Waver has strong opinions and preferences about the schools she chooses to work in and why she chose to be a teacher, there are two areas she believes are factors for leaving the teaching profession. They are teacher pay and societal respect for the teaching profession.

Teacher Pay. When asked about teaching salaries, Ms. Waver feels that the salaries teachers earn not only affect their livelihood, but she also feels it reflects the respect teaching has in society not only in terms of what teachers are paid, but also in terms of how education is funded.

Pay is important. People here have families, they have bills. I hated seeing ... Even when it wasn't me, I had my own car. It killed me to see teachers who had Master's Degrees and were a one car family. Like why? That doesn't make sense to me. You are a professional with years of experience ...Having your master's degree, it takes forever to pay off if it ever does. You don't get back. I feel like I gave myself a raise when I stopped teaching because I wasn't buying all of these things for the classroom. I could make less money and still be ahead because I wasn't spending money on my job. I think it deserves treatment, it deserves ... it should never be something in our district that is poo pood. It is serious business,

it is livelihood and people know what their sacrificing. So let's acknowledge it and call it what it is and say we're trying to do better.

She also expresses dissatisfaction with a lack of standardization when it comes to expectations of teachers and how they are paid. She describes a certain amount of inequity in how teachers are held accountable for their duties and responsibilities and believes there should be some way to differentiate pay for teachers who are doing more than others.

Also there ought to be, I truly believe, there ought to be differentiation. I was personally and professionally struggling with the fact that I'd work an eleven hour day and I had colleagues that would work seven and a half hour days and I was paid the same as them. I had more responsibility, more stress, I was doing agendas for this team meeting and that meeting and professional development and all of this. I know I chose that but I chose that because it needed to be done, nobody else was doing it. I saw that it offered me possibly, potentially and opportunity to grow to be considered for other things but you can't help but have a tinge of resentment toward people that you see doing the minimum and you're doing the maximum and you're paid exactly the same.

From her perspective, this causes resentment among teachers because they are professionals with college degrees who are working, and in some cases more than other teachers, to barely make a livable wage. The result is a level of dissatisfaction that may offset other motivations they may have for staying in the profession.

Professional Respect. Along the same lines of teacher pay, Ms. Waver expresses frustration with the level of respect the teaching profession receives from society in general. Interestingly, throughout the interview there are some conflicting revelations in how she perceives this idea of respect and the teaching profession. On a personal level, she believes that the teaching profession is one that garners respect and expresses that

when she discusses why she returned to Desert Central School after taking a break to work in the service and hospitality sector.

(After) taking a year off after teaching at the North District, and I bartended, which was really fun and it was a totally different ...it was a total 180. Towards the end of that year bartending, I started to feel like very under-challenged. I wasn't proud of what I was doing and I think that's something that's really important for me, is to have a feeling of like when you meet people and you talk to people and you share about your day. With bartending I was like, I don't really know what to say, it was kinda of busy. But when I leave school, I mean, in a school day there's just a million things that happen throughout the day that challenge me, that make me laugh or make me grow as a person. I'm learning new things as I'm teaching students. That brought me back.

Even though she sees teaching as a respectable profession, she also has an internal struggle with some of the perceptions society has about teaching and how that plays out in policy making and organizational practices. This is an aggravating factor for her, and she struggles with it because the idea of being perceived as and being respected as a professional is important to her.

Pay is not just food on your table. It's a big part of it. But it's also a measure in the level of societal importance that your role holds. And you can't help but watch your neighbors and ... You can't help but notice that you are not paid what you should for the very important work that you do, and it's discouraging. In our society what you are paid is a measure of how valued you are, and it's disheartening, like, "Really? That's what you think of me?" Well that hurts a little. I have to tell you. And I don't mean you. I mean our state.

Even with this internal conflict, conditions in the working environment, and actions by her colleagues and administration that make her feel respected as a professional, would mitigate discrepancies between her perception of the teaching profession and the larger society's. For her this would be a factor in why she would stay at a school. She said, "One thing that I really like about Desert Central School though too, is that they really

respect teachers and their time, making sure that we're respected and treated as professionals is really important.”

Interview Process. Overall, the interview seemed to go smoothly. Ms. Waver was candid with her responses and had the most specific opinions about the retention and attrition factors we explored. When asked about how she felt about this process and whether or not she felt it would help with teacher retention, she was honest and felt it would be good for some teachers, but not all teachers.

I think that's a tough question, because I'm nervous, and when you ask me these questions, sometimes a face pops into my head, and so to me, if it was a productive conversation that was positive in where we wanted a change to go, and not just someone complaining about things. So, I'm picturing (names a former teacher). And I just think that she wasn't happy here, but she wasn't productive in what she wanted to change. And I think that she's someone that's not going to be happy at any school. So, I don't ... I guess it depends who you have those conversations with, and what their intent is.

When asked about the process for herself, she felt that it was a positive process, but also felt that because we had a good relationship, she would feel comfortable coming to me at any point, even if it was to tell me she was leaving the school. She said, “I think you and I have a good relationship, though. So, then if something was happening throughout the year that was going to keep me from coming back, I would feel comfortable talking to you about it.”

Summary. Ms. Waver is a highly professional and effective teacher. Of the three teachers, she is the most conflicted about teaching in general, and over the years that shows in her movement in and out of schools, as well as in and out of the profession. She is motivated to teach because it is a respectable profession where she is able to make a difference in society. On the other hand, the logistical challenges of this profession, like

teacher pay, time, and perception, conflict with some of her personal priorities, like work-life balance, livelihood, and respect. These conflicts make it challenging for Ms. Waver to clearly articulate what factors would make her stay or leave.

Outlier to the Composites. Six of the seven teachers fit neatly into a composite. Each composite was based on two teachers with similar attributes. The closest areas of alignment for the composite teachers were in experience, career pathway, and age. The one teacher who did not necessarily fit into a composite teacher profile was Meghan. She most closely fit the composite profile of Ms. Waver in terms of experience, career pathway, and age, but she was not as aligned in the challenges and the frustrations the other teachers felt in certain areas. Interestingly, she shared a desire for a work-life balance in particular because she has a hobby outside of work that she is very invested in. To a certain extent, she views her work-life as a means to fulfill her personal goals with this hobby.

I mean, if I could've I really would've just wanna to stay home and do (my hobby), but I'm like, damn, you don't even make that much as, right now to live off of just your (hobby). You have to eat and you have to pay rent, like you can't do that right now.

After further analysis of her responses, while she responded more positively to being a teacher, she still fits more appropriately with the composite of Ms. Waver because she still feels conflicted about being a teacher over the long run. She has just made peace with her circumstances for the time being. If things were to change, it is likely that she would ultimately leave teaching to make her personal goals happen.

I love working with kids, it's one of my biggest passions, working with kids and doing (my hobby), but when I think about my future, and what makes me really happy, I'm like, I can still do (my hobby), but not in a classroom setting. And I

would eventually like to be out of the classroom and do more, I think I've shared this with you, like, more (of my hobby).

District Data Analysis

In addition to the analysis of the interview data, I also conducted a descriptive analysis of teachers leaving the district schools. Using the data set from the end of the 2017-18 school year, I determined that there were 80 teachers with similar experiences and backgrounds to the teachers I interviewed who chose to separate from the district either through retirement or resignation. Filtering the data, I looked at the number of years they worked in the district prior to separating. I then sorted the teachers into similar age and experience backgrounds using their birthdates and years of experience in the district. Based on birth dates, I had three categories of teachers that aligned with the three composite profile teachers I created from the interview responses. From there I was able to calculate the percentage of teachers leaving in each age group as compared to the total number of teachers in the district as well as the total number of teachers leaving the district in each age group. I also calculated the number of teachers in each group that left the district based on the number of years they had been with the district. Finally, I was able to determine how many teachers in each group were returning teachers after having taken a previous leave from the district.

Table 3*Analysis of District Data by Teachers' Birth Year*

	Born prior to 1965	Born between 1966-1980	Born between 1981-1996
% of total teachers in district	4%	8%	9%
# of teachers leaving the district	18	28	34
Teachers with < 5 years in the district	10	18	24
Teachers with 5-10 years	4	2	8
Teachers with 10+ years	4	8	2
Returning teachers after a previous leave	7	9	11

For the most part, this data aligns with the patterns I might expect to see based upon the age groups of the teachers and their backgrounds. For instance, the oldest teachers make up the smallest number of teachers with fewer than five years of experience, and the youngest teachers make up the largest. One exception might be that only two teachers in the highest age bracket had ten or more years of district experience, but they also make up the highest number of rehires. Many of these teachers had been rehired to the district within the past five years, so their experience in the district in this data only represented the time since they had been rehired. When combined with their previous years of teaching experience in the district, their years teaching in the district may be much higher.

Finally, the teachers who are leaving at the highest rate are the youngest teachers. Even when I factor in a couple of years of prior teaching experience, they are still leaving at alarming rates within five years of coming to our district. I do not have enough information in the separation data from this age group to determine if there is a direct alignment with my profile of Ms. Kindred. However, using what was learned from the analysis of this group of teachers, it may be possible to draw some loose connections. For example, while Ms. Kindred seemed very happy at Desert Central School, she did indicate through her responses that a major life change, like a move, could be a reason why she would leave, and in the case of one of the teachers that I used to construct the profile, she did leave at the end of the year to move to another state. Teachers that fit this description may be in the early stages of meeting societally defined adult milestones. As this group of teachers age and reach more of these milestones, their priorities and motivations may change, and this in turn could influence their decision to stay or leave.

Again, this would be a very loose connection, but I think this analysis demonstrates that this type of data alone may present some general ideas about when a person may decide to leave a district, and very broadly why, particularly in the case of life phases such as retirement. Ultimately, if a school leader wants to be able to proactively address retention and attrition, they need more information than readily available administrative data to determine the factors that might influence a teacher to leave and why.

Summary

The interviews gave the teachers opportunities to provide their perspectives about careers and working at the school and to expound on factors that have been shown to be associated with teacher retention and attrition as outlined in the literature review. Yet it was challenging to sort and to separate out the different factors that are associated with teacher retention or attrition. Many of the teachers' responses overlapped and drew connections between different factors making it difficult to determine whether or not particular teachers were likely to stay or leave a school.

Based upon the analysis from the years of experience and career pathways, I was able to find some commonalities among the teacher participants which I used to create composite teacher profiles, allowing me to make comparisons of the teachers' responses across the three groups. This process revealed that age was a common trait the teachers within each composite shared. Also, through this process I discovered common opinions and values that the teachers in the composites shared in relation to the teacher and retention factors I identified in the literature review.

Finally, I was able to take a closer look at the district data for teachers leaving in the school district based upon their age and experience. This data yielded few outcomes that in general make sense for the age group and where they were in their career trajectories. It also suggested that there may be a loose alignment between the teachers' responses and actions of other teachers in the school district with similar ages however, the data on its own may not be enough for a school leader to gather insights and develop a strategic teacher retention plan.

Chapter 5: Summary

Introduction

This chapter reviews the research problem, the methodology used to conduct the study, some of the key findings from the research and analysis of data, and insights for future practice.

Restatement of the Problem

Compared to suburban school districts, urban school districts tend to have higher teacher exit rates, which places additional strain upon the districts' schools and their resources. While research has demonstrated that there are many factors associated with teachers' decisions to leave, this study attempts to determine if it may be more effective for individual school leaders to identify the factors that might influence teachers to remain teaching in a school (Sutcher et al., 2016).

Summary of Study

The intent of this study was to determine the effects of common attrition and retention factors, such as teacher qualifications and certification, experience, climate and culture, school administration, and working conditions, which were identified through a study of the research in the literature review. I analyzed the responses from interviews I conducted as the teachers' school leader using questions designed to elicit teachers' perspective about these issues. The teachers' responses were coded and sorted into a matrix of attributes categorized by the factors identified in the literature review to reveal similarities and differences amongst the group of teachers. While this process aided in highlighting individual teacher preferences, because the sample size was small and

focused on a single school, it did not necessarily reveal straightforward patterns in the teachers' retention or attrition decisions. Therefore, I created composite teacher profiles, each representing a group of teachers with common attributes and compared them. By clustering the factors into composite teacher profiles, I was able to identify key issues that might influence teacher retention or attrition that a school leader should consider when addressing this issue. Ultimately, the study set out to determine what factors influence teachers to decide to stay at or leave a school, and whether or not this interview process might be a tool a school leader could use to influence teacher retention.

Teachers' Responses

In their interviews, the teachers discussed the following factors and how they worked together to shape their employment decisions:

- Experience, schooling, credentials
- School selection/staying factors
- Mentoring/collegial support
- Induction/professional development
- Administrative support
- Working conditions

After coding the teachers' responses to the questions, it was easy to ascertain that for the most part, as was determined in the literature review, all these areas were important to teachers and to the work they do, but they did not necessarily determine whether a teacher would decide to leave a school or not. The interviews allowed the teachers to express their feelings and opinions about topics that affect their professional

responsibilities daily, so they were able to speak to nearly all the topics with a level of confidence, and in some cases, passion. For some of the teachers, some factors were important, and others were not. For other teachers, a different set of factors was more important than others. Ultimately, while I was able to get rich information about the factor related to attrition, it was not as easy to determine patterns amongst the teachers that a busy school leader could use to determine how to strategically approach retention and attrition issues. For that reason, I decided to conduct a cross-case analysis to create composite teacher profiles.

Teacher Commonalities

To create the composite profiles, I needed to determine where there were more commonalities among the teachers' responses. I found the responses to experience, schooling, and credentials were the most straightforward, and were therefore easier to analyze for similarities. Furthermore, the questions about experience elicited responses about years of experience but they also revealed changes in employment, which I was able to use to help create the composite profiles.

Composite Teacher Profile

Using the data from the questions about experience, schooling, and credentials, I was able to create composite teacher profiles. These profiles assisted in the analysis of the remaining retention and attrition factors. Interestingly, while experience, schooling, and credentials were the initial categories I used to group teachers together, through this process, I identified age and career phase as additional commonalities within each of these composites. While they are not necessarily traits that had been initially identified on

the onset of this study, they may be factors that can be leveraged by school leaders to increase teacher retention.

Data Analysis and Findings

I interviewed seven teachers for this study. Each composite was made up of two to three teachers based on their responses to experience, schooling, and credentials. As I analyzed their responses, I was able to discern some common personal characteristics as well as opinions about the attrition and retention factors identified in the literature review. Using that information, I created profiles of teachers that represent the sentiments of teachers that make up that composite. These are the composite teacher profiles and the teachers from the study that comprise them. All identities have been masked to confidentiality purposes:

Ms. Kindred: Sara and Samantha

Ms. Harmony: Carla and Heather

Ms. Waver: Allie, Sheila, and Meghan

These composites helped me identify commonalities amongst specific groups of teachers and their feeling and opinions about factors that may influence retention and attrition. Additionally, I was able to determine how a school leader could utilize this information to develop strategic retention plan with specific teacher groups.

Composite Summaries and Findings

In this section I will describe each teacher composite profile. I will give an overview of their personal and professional background, along with a description of the findings based on the analysis I conducted in the previous chapter.

Ms. Kindred. While Ms. Kindred has several years of teaching experience, she is still in the relatively early stages of her career, meaning she still has many years left before she is able to retire. Ms. Kindred would be considered a millennial and her life has been heavily influenced by rapid technological advancements and social media.

Professionally, Ms. Kindred derives much of her job satisfaction from making connections. Three levels of connection that align with the retention and attrition factors outlined in the literature review are as follows:

1. A strong connection to the students and families in the community she serves is important because it gives her purpose and a reason to work as hard as she does in a challenging school
2. A strong connection to school personnel and administration is important because she thrives on having connections with and working with others who are working with her for a common purpose. Additionally, she prefers these relationships to be collegial rather than directive, as if to say, “We are in this together.”
3. A strong connection to the instructional philosophy and mission of the school is important as it supports the cohesive climate and culture for the school. She values the structure and interconnectedness this type of climate and culture fosters.

Ms. Harmony. On the other end of the career spectrum is Ms. Harmony. Ms. Harmony has over 20 years of teaching experience and is nearing retirement age. She would be considered a baby boomer and has experienced many changes throughout her

career in education, policies, and technology. She loves teaching and has no intention of doing anything else professionally. Her purpose for teaching and for staying at Desert Central school is rooted in the idea of community, and more importantly, being a contributing member of the community. This can be seen on a variety of levels.

1. Ms. Harmony lives in the community where she is a teacher. As a teacher, she sees it as responsibility to serve the students and families that live near or within her community, as this is an active way of making a difference in her affiliated community.
2. Being a contributing member of the school community is very important for Ms. Harmony. She wants to be a part of the community's successes and failures. She is willing to do what she needs to in order to maintain collegiality amongst her colleagues, whether it is among the whole school community or within the micro-community of her grade level teammates.
3. Since she values the support and camaraderie a community brings to her life, she in turn wants to be a part of creating the community within her classroom walls and works hard to establish it for her students.

Ms. Waver. This teacher was most challenging to categorize, especially because while she has strong opinions, she is ambivalent about her preferences and needs. Ms. Waver is in the middle of her career and has many years of experience behind her, but still many years left before she can retire. While she is not a millennial, nor is she a baby boomer, she is old enough to have experienced significant changes in education and rapid technology advancement. She seems to be conflicted about her desire to continue to work

in the education field, to which she has given so many of her professional years, yet it does not necessarily provide her with the level of professional and personal satisfaction she desires. This conflict is evident on multiple levels.

1. Ms. Waver prefers working with the student population found in Title 1 schools, but she is conflicted about the overwhelming challenges that come with serving this demographic of students.
2. Ms. Waver values teacher autonomy and is interested in training or initiatives that she believes will help her become more effective and efficient. This value can create tension for her when a training or mandate is mandatory.
3. There is a conflict for Ms. Waver in terms of respect for the teaching profession. While she has respect for teaching, she has challenges being a teacher because she feels that others in society do not necessarily have respect for the profession.

Findings

Once the composites were completed, and I was able to determine commonalities and differences amongst the group of teachers and determine the degree to which the factors identified in the literature review influenced their decision to stay or leave a school. In my analysis, I found that for these teachers, all of the factors are valuable, as they are associated with their effectiveness as teachers, but ultimately, the priority teachers place on these factors is dependent upon their experience and background and where they are in the phases of their careers and life.

Discussion of the Results

Effect of Teacher Experience and Background

The results of this study show that teacher experience and background may be factors that indicate a teacher's likelihood to stay at or leave a school. All of the teachers that participated in the interview had come to Desert Central School with some experience teaching at another school. Of the seven teachers, five had only taught at two or fewer schools prior to their current position. Additionally, of those five, three had moved schools because of a move or an issue out of their control, rather than by choice. Four of these teachers were used to write the composites for Ms. Kindred and Ms. Harmony. These teachers did not indicate they were going to move schools other than for a life change. At the end of the school year, when these interviews took place, one of these teachers did leave Desert Central School because her husband received a job transfer to another state.

The two remaining teachers were used to write the composite for Ms. Waiver. Both teachers had changed schools at least four times prior to coming to Desert Central School. The composite was written as if the teacher was currently a teacher, and at the time of the interview, one of the teachers was indeed teaching, but the other had already left the profession for a second time. Additionally, at the end of the first semester, the other teacher left her teaching position to pursue a job as an administrative assistant. This was her third break from the teaching profession in her career.

While all the teachers in the Ms. Waiver profile had technically left a school at some point prior to coming to Desert Central School, in this small sample, it seemed that

the more times a teacher changes schools, there seemed to be a higher likelihood that a teacher may leave a school compared to teachers with fewer grade or school changes. When trying to determine whether or not this was in alignment with the district separation data from the previous year, I did not have enough information about the school moves in the data set I was given to determine whether or not this was a factor at the district level as well.

Influence of Career Phases and Age

In this study, the factors outlined in the literature review did seem to have an influence on teacher retention and attrition. More interestingly, the degree to which specific factors impacted a teacher's decision to stay or leave depended upon certain teacher groups. The biggest commonality among those groups was their career phase, or how many years they had been teaching: ten years or fewer, more than ten years, or within ten years of retirement. Interestingly, in this small sample, grouping teachers by career phase also aligned the teachers by age group. I do not think this would have necessarily been the case had I interviewed someone who entered teaching as a second career, but for purposes of this study, I will discuss the influence of career phases on teacher retention and attrition, in conjunction with age as that is how it aligned using this sample of teachers. In this context, teachers' responses to the identified retention and attrition factors and the importance they placed on them depended on the career phase and age group of the teacher.

Fewer Than Ten Years Experience. This group of teachers was the youngest group of teachers. Interestingly, they are also the only group of teachers that likely grew

up during the rise of social media. These teachers value connection above all things which makes sense because they have always known a connected world. This group of teachers was able to clearly articulate what they were looking for when deciding to work at a school, why they were looking for that, and why it was important to them. For this group of teachers, while they value all individual factors associated with teacher retention and attrition, it is really the overarching factors such as climate and culture, and vision and mission, that matter the most to them. These overarching factors provide purpose for their work, which gives them the connection they desire. The other factors are important in so far as they provide the system or structure needed to achieve that purpose. When those factors are not functioning or are not in place, it can cause a breakdown in connection for this teacher because they are not able to achieve the purpose.

Fewer Than Ten Years to Retirement. This group of teachers has more teaching experience than the others. They value being part of the school community at every level. They have some frustrations over particular factors here and there, but in general, because of their experience, they understand why things happen in a school and they are able to let things go more easily than other groups of teachers. That is not to say they do not care, rather, they have the experience to put challenges into perspective where other teachers are not necessarily able to do so as easily.

Like Ms. Kindred they value factors that are all encompassing, like climate and culture, and vision and mission, but for slightly different reasons. They just want to be a part of a community, and they know that these factors indicate unity of ideas and efforts that help support the student community they serve. They want to be seen as a

contributing member of that community, and as long as the factors that encourage and foster that community are in place, they are willing to stay until they retire.

More Than Ten Years of Experience and More than Ten Years Before Retirement. As I explained earlier, the teachers in this group were the teachers most likely to leave a school earlier than others, simply based on the number of times they changed schools. Unlike the teachers in other phases of their careers, these teachers' responses related more with how the individual factors impacted their personal lives and job satisfaction, rather than on the impact on the collective. They spoke more about work-life balance, salaries and the impact on their quality of life, and time. Where the other teachers' responses seemed to integrate work into their personal life, these teachers spoke about their work-life and their personal life as separate entities.

Since they viewed both parts of their life separately, it seems like all factors could individually influence a teacher in this group to leave a school at some point, if it affected their personal life negatively, even if the collective factors like climate and culture, and vision and mission were intact.

Insights

Through this analysis, I was able to garner many insights into teacher retention and attrition. Throughout this study, I have described the influence experience, background, and career phase and age have on the way teachers prioritize the retention and attrition factors. Additionally, a rationale for conducting this study was to determine how a school leader could use a similar interview process strategically to retain key teaching personnel. For that reason, I am going to focus this discussion on teacher

motivations as I believe understanding why a teacher prioritizes certain factors over others and why, would be the most helpful to a school leader when developing a proactive approach to improving teacher retention.

Teacher Motivations

Prior to interviewing the teachers for this study, through the research process, I identified factors in the research literature that were associated with teacher retention and attrition. Through the interview process, I was able to determine that those factors were professionally important to the teachers in their work at the schools. However, while the factors that were addressed by the teachers in their interviews could affect a teacher's level of job satisfaction, there are other variables that also need to be taken into consideration before I could ascribe those factors as reasons why a teacher would choose to leave a school. As I discussed, experience, background, and career phase and age group were important attributes to consider in relationship to any given factor. Depending upon a teacher's individual circumstances, the priorities they place on these factors could change as they move along in their careers. Therefore, to strategically address teacher retention in their school, a school leader would need to factor in individual teachers' circumstances when developing a plan, as the phase they are in, in their lives and in their careers, as well as how their background and experience combine to form and influence their motivations or their reasons for teaching. To do this, they may want to use this process to focus on three strategies: building relationships, identifying teachers' purpose for teaching, and understanding group dynamics.

Building Relationships

First and foremost, building relationships with individual staff members is crucial to truly understanding their motivations for being teachers and why they do the work they do. Understanding teachers' backgrounds, experiences, and motivations empowers a school leader to anticipate which factors may be relevant to a particular teacher or group of teachers, and thus act proactively. In the literature review of this study, I identified common attrition and retention factors that are valued by teachers. Oftentimes, school leaders use these factors as a starting point for determining a retention plan. In this study, I discovered, that teachers do value those factors; however, the degree to which they value and prioritize them depends on other aspects in their personal and professional lives, which ultimately motivate their professional preferences and decisions.

By building relationships and getting to know their teachers as individuals, school leaders will accomplish two things. First, building relationships addresses one of the important factors for teacher: support from their administration. All three groups of teachers believed the relationship they had with their school leader was important to them. Where they differed was in the nature of that relationship. In some cases, they preferred a more collegial relationship; in others, there was a preference for more of a loose/tight relationship that provides structure but also allows for autonomy. Building relationships with teachers helps a school leader understand what kinds of supervisory relationships individual teachers prefer.

Second, building relationships with individual teachers can promote trust between the administrator and the teacher. This is important because the administrator is in a

supervisory position, and it may take time and dialogue to move beyond this hierarchical relationship so that a teacher feels comfortable enough to share their motivations. In this study, all the groups indicated that they liked the interview process described here and found it valuable, but all qualified their endorsement by stating it was because they had a good relationship with me. In one case, a teacher in the conflicted group said that while she was comfortable because we had a good relationship, she did not know if others would feel the same way. For that reason, it would be worthwhile to take the time to build relationships, as a school leader will be more likely to get to teachers' deeper motivations for staying in the profession or at the school, and not just surface level responses.

Identifying Purpose

While taking time to build relationships with their teachers, it is important that school leaders attempt to discover each teacher's purpose for choosing to work in the education field. In this study, three different groups of teachers chose this career for very specific reasons that went beyond liking children and getting a paycheck. Either they wanted to be a part of a collective working toward righting social justice ills or they wanted their work to be meaningful and an important contribution to their community. Even the conflicted teachers were deeply motivated to help students who came from underserved communities; the challenge for them came in balancing that goal with other factors in their personal or professional lives.

A school leader can proactively use this information to determine whether or not a teacher's motivation for teaching is a fit for the overall vision and mission of the school.

If it is not, a school leader may need to decide if a robust retention plan for a particular teacher is worth the effort of keeping them at the school. It may not be, which could be counterproductive to the overall productivity of the school and the job satisfaction of the teacher. If there is an alignment, a school leader can strategically leverage a teacher's reasons for teaching to help keep them invested in the work of the school by creating a climate and culture that fosters their continued growth around that purpose.

Understanding the Nuances of Group Dynamics

Finally, group and team dynamics are a very important component for teachers and their professional satisfaction. Using teacher motivations as a part of designing teams and professional learning communities is integral and should be a part of an overall teacher retention plan. All three groups of teachers commented at length about the teams they worked in, but all of them valued different aspects of team dynamics. The connected teachers and the community teachers both really valued collaboration and relied heavily on their teams for addressing the day-to-day responsibilities of teaching their students. Additionally, they also valued the emotional and social support they received and gave within their teams and felt it enhanced their work experiences. While the conflicted teachers also wanted to have a positive working relationship with the individuals they worked with, they valued efficiency and effectiveness above collaboration. This was particularly evident when the time spent on collaboration came at the expense of the teacher's personal time, which this group of teachers is motivated by and prioritizes.

To explain the importance of group dynamics further, I would like to describe my personal experience as a school principal with one of the conflicted teachers. Shortly after

the interview, one of the conflicted teachers decided to make a career change mid-year and left Desert Central School. This was a huge disappointment as she was a highly effective teacher and someone I really wanted to retain at our school not just for the school year, but for many years to come. In reflecting upon the past year, I was rather surprised as to why she would make such a big decision, knowing the challenges that her leaving would create for the school and her grade-level teammates. From this interview, I also recalled her feeling positive about the relationship we had and knew that there was also a strong alignment between her personal reasons for being a teacher and the vision and mission of the school. Ultimately, I was able to recall an incident that had happened earlier in the year when she had asked me to come and help establish norms amongst her grade level team to facilitate collaboration. It was difficult at the time, and there was a lot of negotiation that had to take place for the team to come to consensus about which norms to put in place. After the meeting, I could see that the teacher had felt she was singular in her feelings and that the other two members of the team were unified, and that while we had established norms, there was not necessarily a shared sense of satisfaction.

In her interview with me, she did bring up the challenges with her team, and it was clear it was a source of dissatisfaction for her. After analyzing the data from all the interviews, it became clear that this was a major factor as to why she left. The other teachers likely prioritized connection and gained a lot of their job satisfaction from collaborating with others. On the other hand, she valued efficiency and effectiveness and did not share the same definition of collaboration as her teammates. Knowing what I know now, as a school leader, I could have acted more proactively when she first

approached me by helping the team to establish norms that could perhaps mitigate their differences in how they viewed collaboration. Furthermore, had I had this knowledge earlier, I may have been able to avoid this challenging, disruptive situation in the first place by having taken this into consideration when I put the team together, especially since this was the first time this particular team had worked together. Finally, without this research, I would not have recognized that the disconnect this teacher had with her team was significant enough to her that it likely led to her leaving the school. Moving forward, I can use what I know about the importance of team dynamics to solicit information earlier to proactively support highly valued teachers and teams I want to retain in our school district.

Future Implications for School Leaders

This study was also designed to see if school leaders could affect teacher retention in real-time, through this interview process. Of the seven teachers who participated in this study, four continued on to the next school year. One left the school in December of this same school year to make a career change, and the other moved to another state at the end of the school year. The seventh teacher left the teaching profession mid-year.

I am not able to determine from the study whether or not the other four remaining teachers stayed because of the interview process or if they stayed for other reasons. However, most of the teachers indicated that the interview process was a positive one and supported using it as a tool for teacher retention with the right teachers. The teachers that shared their view of the process all mentioned feeling comfortable sharing their opinions with me because of our positive relationship. These sentiments include those of the

teachers who left, which may indicate this is a positive process to use to support teacher retention efforts.

Challenges for school leaders, should they use this process to address teacher retention, may be the amount of time required to interview multiple members of the staff. The time it took to conduct the interviews with teachers varied, with the shortest lasting just under 30 minutes and the longest lasting over one hour and ten minutes. These are conversations about feelings and beliefs, and in order to truly determine a teacher's true motivations, they cannot be rushed. As I discussed in the insights earlier in this chapter, if done correctly, it is possible to gather a lot of information about a teacher's motivations and professional preferences. While this process may seem time-consuming in the beginning, it may actually save time in the long run because there may be less need to act reactively to personnel issues, because they may be less likely to happen in the first place when teachers are professionally satisfied teaching at school where they feel productive and respected.

Having been a busy school leader, I would recommend trying to conduct conversations like this over time, maybe even over multiple years. I would suggest using a strategic approach with the intent of trying to have meaningful conversations with targeted groups of teachers. I would prioritize meeting one or two teachers who I would really want to retain in each grade level or content area first, with the idea that each year, I would target a new set of teachers either during the next semester or the following year. Over time, a school leader could potentially have these kinds of conversations with an entire staff.

Additionally, I established the questions for the interview protocol around a set of issues that research indicated affected teachers' decisions about staying at or leaving a school. While I do not think that it is necessarily important that school leaders use the same protocol and questions I used for this process, I do think it is helpful to have a clear set of issues or factors grounded in research that they want to touch on in the conversation. In this study, the factors identified through the research did align with what these teachers valued, but it was their individual circumstances that determined which factors they prioritized when deciding to stay, or in a couple of cases, leave the school. Additionally, I would recommend the school leaders use their set of questions as a guide to having an authentic conversation rather than a list of questions they need to ask. There should be some flexibility as to whether some questions are answered more fully than others, or if some questions are not answered at all if you are not able to get to all of the questions. The point of the process is building relationships and trust so that the school leader can discover a teacher's true motivations and that can only happen in an authentic conversation. Again, this makes this process more time consuming in the moment, but the information gathered may make this process worthwhile in the long run.

A final word of caution I would give school leaders before embarking on this process with their teachers would be to recognize the power dynamic between themselves and the teachers. Ultimately, the school leader is the evaluator and the supervisor of all the teachers. This could be a barrier to this process if steps are not taken to mitigate for this hierarchical dynamic. I was very purposeful in conducting these interviews with teachers who were in professional good standing with the school and the district.

Additionally, as a part of the IRB process, I was upfront and specific about my duties and responsibilities as their supervisor should they share something with me that required my attention. At the same time, I was clear about the purpose of the study and what I was trying to learn, and that any information they shared would be used to help improve our working environment and our efforts to address teacher retention. I was also clear that anything they shared would not affect their evaluations. I would recommend some variation of this same approach to other school leaders. It seemed to me that the teachers appreciated the clear expectations and appreciated that I was taking the time to hear their thoughts and feelings about being a teacher in our school. I also felt that it prompted them to be more open with their opinions since I was clear that there would not be consequences if they shared something negative.

That said, school leaders also need to be prepared that they may hear some things that may make them feel defensive or may even hurt their feelings. Some of the information my teachers shared with me was not always a positive reflection on my leadership. I think they shared this with me because they trusted that I would not hold it against them. I in turn had to trust that they were giving me this feedback because it was important to them and as the leader, I needed to treat that information with care and not internalize it. While this may be difficult, it is through this process that a healthy, professional relationship can be built between teachers and their school administration.

Limitations

As I mentioned previously, as the researcher, I had been or, at the time, was the teachers' supervisor. This may have been beneficial to this process, as we had already

developed professional relationships, which may have been conducive to deeper conversations. A new administrator may not have that same advantage.

Additionally, these teachers had a choice as to whether or not to participate in the interview, and furthermore were the teachers who felt comfortable enough to participate in this study. There were teachers who did not respond to the request who may have responded differently. In a different context, specifically one that required teachers to participate in a process like this, as their supervisor, there is the possibility that teachers may be reluctant to critique the school, or the school leader, which could negate the purpose of this process.

Finally, this is the study of teachers at one school in a small urban district. While this study may give the school and the district insight into teacher retention within that context, the findings of this study might not be able to be replicated in other schools or districts that serve a high percentage of Title I students. There is the possibility, however, that through this process, school leaders in schools with similar demographics might gain some insights into some practices and approaches that they could use to help retain key staff members.

Summary

For seven years, I was the school leader of a large, urban kindergarten – eighth grade school, serving a diverse student population, of which over 95% qualified for free and reduced lunch. While there are many challenges in this work, among the most difficult and heartbreaking for me as a school leader, was watching multiple teachers leave year after year. The challenges associated with replacing and training many new

teachers each year while difficult, were not nearly as emotionally draining as having to see the effects of teacher attrition on the students in our school. It is hard to witness their disappointment when yet another trusted adult figure in their life leaves, but it is far sadder to see the look of resignation and acceptance of repeated departures in a child's face.

Compared to suburban school districts, urban school districts tend to have higher teacher exit rates, which places additional strain upon the districts' schools and their resources. Compounding this, significant teacher shortages and a decrease in student enrollment of teacher preparation programs has created a teacher shortage, resulting in staffing challenges for schools across the country; Arizona has been particularly hard hit. This study set out to understand the factors influencing teachers to leave or continue to teach in urban schools with a high percentage of Title I students. Additionally, it used an interview process to determine the importance an individual teacher placed on the factors associated with retention identified through a review of research. Finally, the study sought to determine if a school leader could use a similar interview process as a way to intervene proactively rather than reactively to concerns that may influence teacher retention.

While this study was very small and would be difficult to replicate given the staffing crises urban school districts face, a school leader may consider using this process to gain a better understanding of their teachers' backgrounds, experiences, and motivations. These insights may help school leaders build trusting relationships with their teachers, determine and leverage individuals' reasons for teaching as well as their longer-

term career goals and aspirations. This in turn may help school leaders make better decisions regarding hiring and team development to improve collaboration, productivity, and job satisfaction among their teachers.

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APPENDIX A
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

EXEMPTION GRANTED

Jeanne Powers
 Division of Educational Leadership and Innovation - Tempe
 480/965-0841
 jeanne.powers@asu.edu

Dear Jeanne Powers:

On 6/22/2018 the ASU IRB reviewed the following protocol:

Type of Review:	Initial Study
Title:	A Proactive Approach to Teacher Retention in High Needs Schools: Understanding Why Teachers Stay
Investigator:	Jeanne Powers
IRB ID:	STUDY00007630
Funding:	None
Grant Title:	None
Grant ID:	None
Documents Reviewed:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consent Form, Category: Consent Form; • District Consent for Study, Category: Other (to reflect anything not captured above); • Recruitment email Michelle Berg, Category: Recruitment Materials; • HRP 503a Protocol Michelle Berg, Category: IRB Protocol; • Interview Protocol Michelle Berg, Category: Measures (Survey questions/Interview questions /interview guides/focus group questions);

The IRB determined that the protocol is considered exempt pursuant to Federal Regulations 45CFR46 (2) Tests, surveys, interviews, or observation on 6/22/2018.

In conducting this protocol you are required to follow the requirements listed in the INVESTIGATOR MANUAL (HRP-103).

Sincerely,

IRB Administrator

cc: Michelle Berg
 Michelle Berg

APPENDIX B
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Note: Semi-structured interviews will be conducted. The following questions will be utilized to begin and guide the conversations.

Introduction: Thank you so much for taking the time for this interview. I am interested in engaging in an informal conversation to understand factors that keep/kept you at Desert Central School and as well as to identify factors of possible frustration, which may or may have influenced your decision to leave. As your current supervisor, I recognize you may be reluctant to consent or may feel uncomfortable discussing some topic with me. The purpose of this study is meant as a learning opportunity for me, and is in not tied to your position at Desert Central School or with the Desert Central School district. Your responses will be kept confidential at all times throughout my study, and you are, of course, free to decide that you do not want to participate at any point. I will be recording this interview and will be transcribing it at a later time. Do you consent to this interview?

Questions for the Interviewee:

- What is your current position?
- How long have you taught at Desert Central School? (Experience/years)
- How did you come to the teaching profession? Education, background, etc... (Experience/Schooling/Credentials)
- Did you come to Desert Central School with prior teaching experience? If so, can you describe? Position? Years of experience? Etc. (Experience/years)
- In selecting a school, what are factors that you are looking for as an employee?
- Why did you decide to come to Desert Central School.
- What keeps (kept) you coming back to Desert Central School each year?
- How are you supported in your current role? Are there any specific people or groups of people that you feel support you in your work? (Mentoring/Collegial support)
- How do you feel about the training and professional development you receive in Desert Central School District? At Desert Central School? (Induction/Professional Development)
- In what areas of your work do you feel like your work makes a difference? Can you give examples of when you feel you have made a difference? (Efficacy/Working Conditions)
- When do you feel most effective as a teacher? Can you give me an specific example of a situation that made you feel effective? (Efficacy/Working Conditions)

- When do you feel listened to and/or valued by your peers? By the leadership team? By me as the school principal? Can you give specific examples? (School principal)
- In what areas of your job do you feel like you have the greatest autonomy? The least autonomy? Can you give me some examples? (Working Conditions/External/Internal)
- From your perspective, how is the management and discipline of students at Desert Central School? Can you give me an example? (Working Conditions/Internal)
- Do the resources and materials at the school support your ability to teach your students? (Working Conditions/Internal)
- If you were able to change one thing about your job, what would it be?

Possible Probing questions

- How does your experience at Desert Central School compare to the other schools you have worked at?
- Is there anything that we didn't cover that has contributed to your decision to stay/to leave?

Identify possible issues that may cause the employee to consider leaving

- If you were to consider leaving... help me understand what might cause you to leave?
- Think back to a time when you have been anxious or frustrated about your job. Can you explain what caused the anxiety or frustration?

To consider:

- Probing questions about external factors influencing decisions