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Why They Stay:  
Factors Contributing to Second Stage Teachers' Decisions to Remain  
in the Teaching Profession

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at Virginia Commonwealth University.

by

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This dissertation represents the most challenging thing I have ever done in my life. Earning a PhD has been a dream of mine for such a long time, but as most graduate students could probably tell you, the process is filled with self-doubt, feeling like an imposter, and questioning if this is really worth it. It is also filled with excitement! You actually get to study something that you care about, something that could potentially lead to further work about which you are passionate. Those moments would not have been possible without the community of support in which I live and work. First and foremost, I would not be in this position had it not been for the unwavering love and support of my family and friends. To my mom Brenda, thank you for always believing in me. You always knew this was possible and never once doubted that I would be able to complete this task. To my husband Mick, thank you for dealing with the craziness that comes with graduate school. Knowing that you were there for me every step of the way helped me keep moving forward. To my friends and family members, thank you for always cheering me on. And for always asking if I was making progress – procrastinators such as myself need those constant reminders that we should be working! And of course this work would not be possible without my professors, committee members, and university colleagues. Thank you for believing that I am smart enough and capable enough to earn my PhD. And thank you for providing me with the freedom to study what I wanted to and the support to do it well.

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## **Abstract**

### **WHY THEY STAY: FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO SECOND STAGE TEACHERS' DECISIONS TO REMAIN IN THE TEACHING PROFESSION**

By Samantha T. Hope

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at Virginia Commonwealth University.

Virginia Commonwealth University, 2019

Director: Sharon Zumbrunn, PhD  
Associate Professor, Foundations of Education  
School of Education

Teacher attrition, particularly in hard-to-staff urban schools, is a problem addressed by many researchers. Although this research often focuses on novice teachers, those with three or fewer years of experience, there is a growing body of literature that examines second stage teachers, those with between four and 20 years of experience. Like their novice colleagues, these second stage teachers are also at risk of leaving the profession, which can have negative consequences for students. While much of the research focuses on reasons why teachers leave the profession, there is a growing interest in understanding how teachers reach the decision to remain in the profession. Psychological theory and existing scholarship on the work lives of teachers provides one conceptual framework for exploring the topic of teacher retention. The theory of basic psychological needs explains that teachers, like employees in all other professions need to feel fulfillment of the needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness in

their professional lives. This contributes to their sense of job satisfaction, or enjoyment, which then makes it more likely for them to remain in the profession. One potential way to help second stage teachers meet these needs and experience job satisfaction is through teacher leadership roles, such as mentoring.

The current exploratory study used qualitative methods to interview urban second stage teacher leaders to learn how their experiences fulfill their needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, lead to a sense of job satisfaction, and influence their decision to remain in the profession. The participants in this study all had between four and 20 years of experience and all served in a leadership role as a mentor to pre-service teachers through an urban teacher residency program. They shared details and experiences of their professional lives from their decisions to become teachers in the urban school district, through their novice stage of teaching, and into their second stage of teaching, including the decision to take on the complicated leadership role of serving as a mentor to a pre-service teacher through a yearlong residency program.

The participants shared experiences which indicated fulfillment of the three basic needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. They also shared that they felt a sense of satisfaction both from their work as classroom teachers and their role as mentors. Although they experienced need fulfillment and job satisfaction, participants also shared sources of dissatisfaction, and many explained that they were contemplating leaving the profession, with some feeling that teaching is no longer a long-term career. One noteworthy finding is that participants expressed a desire for feeling like a professional, which played a large role in the career decisions they made.

## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

Like other professions, the field of teaching must deal with employee turnover; unfortunately, research indicates that teaching faces higher rates of turnover than other professions (Ingersoll & Perda, 2009). Turnover in the teaching profession can occur because of a teacher moving to a new school or district (migration), retiring, or leaving the profession altogether (attrition) (Ingersoll, 2001). Additionally, turnover may be due to a teacher shifting his or her teaching assignment, such as moving from special to general education (Boe, Cook, & Sunderland, 2008). Although moving to a new school or teaching assignment does not affect the overall number of teachers in the workforce, it does have consequences on the school and students left behind. This problem with turnover “occurs on a grand scale among American schools” (Johnson, Berg, & Donaldson, 2005, p. 5) and affects every school district in every state in the country, as is evidenced by recent news headlines.

Schools and school systems are left struggling to attract and train new recruits, an endeavor that is costly and time consuming. In addition to being costly in terms of the money and time spent recruiting and training new teachers, teacher turnover is also associated with lower student achievement (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). This finding is particularly troublesome when considering one area hit hardest by teacher attrition, urban school systems. These school systems are found in geographical cities and typically serve minority majority student bodies

from low socio-economic status homes (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). These urban school systems, in which student achievement is often an issue regardless of teacher turnover, face some of the highest rates of teacher attrition and often contain hard-to-staff schools (Ronfeldt, 2012). With as many as 74% of beginning teachers leaving the profession (Papay, Bacher-Hicks, Page, & Marinell, 2017), it is no wonder urban school systems struggle so greatly. The constant revolving door of teachers has far-reaching consequences from increased expenditures, to hindered collegiality, to lower student achievement.

Because losing teachers is costly and has negative consequences on students, educational practitioners and researchers have searched for answers to the question of why teachers leave the profession. Numerous studies on teacher attrition have been conducted by scholars, and those in educational leadership positions often conduct exit interviews with departing faculty to develop a greater understanding of the factors contributing to their decisions to leave. Although this line of work is important, perhaps more important is an examination of what factors contribute to a teacher's decision to remain committed to the profession. As De Neve and Devos (2017) explain, "Existing studies tend to pay more attention to the deficits or problems rather than the motivation that encourages teachers to stay" (p. 7). Although all teachers likely face job elements that may lead to their leaving the profession, some find the motivation to remain, perhaps stemming from the opportunity to take on new challenges (Fiarman, 2007) or simply being dedicated to the students they teach (Battle & Looney, 2014). Exploring why teachers have decided to stay in the profession beyond their initial novice period can help practitioners and researchers understand factors that influence teachers' career decisions.

## **Background and Rationale for the Study**

In 2003, Ingersoll examined national statistics on teacher attrition. Widely referenced in studies since then, he stated that almost half of the population of beginning teachers leaves the classroom within the first five years of their teaching career (Ingersoll, 2003). Teacher attrition is a major problem experienced by school districts across the nation, regardless of the type of community in which they are situated. In a recent examination of cumulative instability rates of teachers in Texas, researchers found that urban, suburban, and rural schools all experienced issues of teacher turnover over the course of eight years (Holme, Jabbar, Germain, & Dinning, 2018). While teacher attrition is a widespread problem, there is one teaching environment that may struggle more so than others. A recent study (Papay, Bacher-Hicks, Page, & Marinell, 2017) exploring teacher attrition across several urban school districts found that while attrition rates varied from district to district, Ingersoll's 2003 findings may have underestimated the scope of the problem in urban environments; "44% to 74% left within five years" (Papay et al., 2017, p. 435).

### **Urban Teacher Career Decisions**

Given the high rates of teacher turnover in urban environments, it is not surprising that much of the literature on teachers' career decisions is focused on urban teachers. While teachers in all environments, rural, suburban, and urban, face workplace elements that may serve to push them toward a new teaching assignment or an entirely new career, the nature of the urban teaching environment may exacerbate conditions that would be tolerable elsewhere (Johnson & Birkeland, 2003). One of the primary sources of urban teacher discontent, and ultimately the decision to leave is a lack of administrator support (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003; Johnson, Kraft, & Papay, 2012). New teachers need feedback from and the support of school administrators,

however, by focusing on new teachers, more experienced teachers may not receive the support they need from administrators (Bressman, Winter, & Efron, 2018; Eros, 2011; Kirkpatrick & Johnson, 2014). This can create a cyclical attrition problem. When teachers leave because they do not feel supported, administrators likely must focus their attention on recruiting and training new teachers, which could then leave experienced teachers feeling unsupported.

Although administrative support is seen as a primary factor in urban teacher attrition, other factors also play a role. There may be a lack of staff collegiality or a negative professional culture in the school building (Yonezawa, Jones, & Singer, 2011). This may also be attributed to administrative support and a high rate of staff turnover. If there are consistently new teachers filling vacancies, there will be less collegiality simply because the teachers have not had adequate time to form relationships. Likewise, an influx of new teachers will require administrative attention, and the overall school culture may suffer (Johnson, Kraft, & Papay, 2012). Similarly, issues with student discipline and academic achievement may act as factors that push teachers away from teaching in the urban environment (Boyd, Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2005). However, this is also connected to other factors in the urban environment; teachers' perceptions of positive school climate are associated with increased student achievement (Johnson, Kraft, & Papay, 2012).

There are numerous factors in the urban teaching environment that may push teachers away from a career in this environment. Although some researchers have analyzed large-scale quantitative data to uncover factors that influence urban teachers' career decisions (e.g., Ingersoll, 2001), the connectedness of the factors indicates that survey data alone will not provide a complete picture. Delving deeper into teachers' experiences in the urban environment through qualitative methods may provide a fuller understanding of how they navigate the

challenges of the urban school environment and arrive at the decision to remain. Additionally, focusing research on specific groups of teachers within the urban environment may provide a clearer picture of how these specific groups make the decision to remain in the profession.

### **Second Stage Teachers**

Although a great deal of research is devoted to elements of the urban teaching environment that may push teachers to leave, there is a growing body of research examining how a teacher's career stage may be associated with career decisions. While much of this research focuses on high attrition rates of beginning teachers (e.g., Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 2003; Ingersoll, 2003), teachers in the second stage of their career, those who have tenure and anywhere from four to 20 years of experience (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2013), are also at risk of leaving the profession (Yonezawa, Jones, & Singer, 2011). Teachers in this stage of their career are capable of effectively managing their classrooms and delivering instruction, however they still desire meaningful feedback and professional development to improve their practice (Bressman, Winter, & Efron, 2018; Kirkpatrick & Johnson, 2014). Often, though they do not receive feedback nor professional development designed with them in mind; because much attention is devoted to recruiting and retaining novice teachers, particularly in the urban environment, second stage teachers are often left on their own while administrators focus on the novice teachers in the building (Bressman, Winter, & Efron, 2017; Eros, 2011). These second stage teachers, who desire challenges and opportunities to grow may feel the pull of other teaching positions or other careers altogether (Yonezawa, Jones, & Singer, 2011). With the increased confidence that comes with being a second stage teacher and unmet professional desires, they may easily find employment elsewhere that more fully meets their professional expectations.



## **Potential Reasons for Teacher Retention**

While each teacher makes the decision to stay in or leave the teaching profession, the fact that many decide to stay indicates that they have some underlying reason for staying. There are existing lines of research that provide possible reasons for the decision to remain. One such line of research examines job satisfaction, or an overall positive feeling in one's job (Judge, Weiss, Kammeyer-Muller, & Hulin, 2017). Researchers have noted that teachers who indicate their dissatisfaction with their work are also likely to make the decision to leave the profession (e.g., Ingersoll & Smith, 2003; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011). Although improved work conditions, such as supportive administrators, low student discipline issues, and adequate resources may all play a role in a teacher's feeling of job satisfaction, some researchers have taken a different route in examining factors that may influence a teacher's sense of job satisfaction.

One line of research looks at teacher leadership roles, roles beyond classroom instruction either directly or indirectly influencing student instruction (Harris, 2005), as a way to potentially increase job satisfaction and the decision to remain in the profession. The idea is that a career as a teacher does not lend itself to upward mobility, as do other careers (Reeves & Lowenhaupt, 2016). Therefore, in order to continue to challenge and develop teachers, they need to be given alternative responsibilities, such as providing mentorship to student or novice teachers (Arnett, 2017; Brill & McCartney, 2008). These new roles may increase their job satisfaction directly (Berg et al., 2005), or may simply help them re-engage in the work of teaching, which could then increase their satisfaction (Kirkpatrick & Johnson, 2014). One group of teachers who may benefit greatly from leadership roles is those in the second stage, with four to 20 years of experience as a classroom teacher (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2013). Leadership roles can provide the challenge and growth opportunities second stage teachers seek and may lead to an increased

feeling of job satisfaction (Margolis, 2008). Taking on a leadership role may also be influential in their career decisions of second stage teachers (Fiarman, 2007).

Another line of research applies psychological theory to understand how a teacher's work or leadership roles may influence his or her sense of job satisfaction and career decisions. Using the theory of basic psychological needs (Ryan & Deci, 2001), scholars have begun to explain how fulfillment of a teacher's needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness are associated with a sense of job satisfaction and ultimately, the decision to remain in the teaching profession (e.g., Brien, Hass, & Savoie, 2012; Collie, Shapka, Perry, & Martin, 2016). It should be noted that this line of research is still in its early stages, and most of the work in this area uses quantitative measures, some of which have been borrowed from studies of employees of other careers. There has been a call for researchers to use qualitative methods to understand fulfillment of teachers' basic psychological needs (Vermeulen, Castelijns, Kools, & Koster, 2012). Additionally, much of the work in this field comes from countries other than the United States. Given the cultural differences that exist between nations as well as the challenges unique to specific school systems, this field of study would benefit from small-scale explorations of teacher's basic psychological need fulfillment in specific United States school systems.

### **Purpose and Significance**

Because of the scope of teacher turnover, numerous studies have focused on attrition rates and reasons for the high turnover of the teaching workforce, rather than focusing on retention and the reasons teachers stay (De Neve & Devos, 2017). Early work by Charters (1956), Chapman (1984), and others attempted to create models showing factors that contribute to a teacher's decision to remain in the profession. Although decades have passed since these early researchers set out to understand teacher retention, there still is a great deal of work to be

done. Understanding factors that specific groups of teachers face when making their career decisions is important, as various work environments and career stages differ from one another, and factors that influence the decisions of one group may not be the same for another group. Additionally, in the decades since this early research on models of teacher retention, scholars have begun to examine job satisfaction and its antecedents, such as psychological need fulfillment, to develop a deeper understanding of how teachers arrive at their career decisions.

This study sought to collect information describing how basic psychological needs, job satisfaction, and other factors play a role in urban second stage teacher leaders' decisions to remain in the teaching profession. An image depicting the relationship of the elements that created the framework for this study is included (Figure 1). There is a great deal of literature explaining why urban teachers decide to leave the profession; factors that contribute to attrition in all school systems may be more pronounced in urban school districts. Less is known about how teachers overcome these challenges and make the decision to stay. This study contributes to the knowledge base by providing data from those who made the decision not only to continue teaching in the urban environment during the second stage of their career, but also to take on an additional leadership role as a mentor to pre-service teachers in an urban teacher residency program. Understanding how their experiences as a classroom teacher and as a mentor contribute to their job satisfaction, psychological need fulfillment, and decision to stay provides information for scholars and practitioners alike. The findings of this study may help those involved in any aspect of teacher education, training, or retention and begin to answer the question asked by David Cox, a school board member in a county facing high rates of teacher attrition, "What will keep teachers teaching? I don't know" (Papantonis, 2018).

## Research Questions

The guiding question for this research study on teacher retention was *Why do second stage teacher leaders stay in an urban school district?* Specifically, this study sought to answer the following research questions:

- 1) How do urban second stage teacher leaders experience the fulfillment of the needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness
  - a) In their role as a classroom teacher?
  - b) In their role as a teacher leader?
- 2) How do urban second stage teacher leaders experience job satisfaction
  - a) In their role as a classroom teacher?
  - b) In their role as a teacher leader?
- 3) How do urban second stage teachers describe their professional experiences as influencing their decision to remain in the profession?
  - a) Which factors from their work as a classroom teacher do they identify as being important to the decision to remain?
  - b) Which factors from their leadership role do they identify as being important to the decision to remain?

## Overview of Methodology

This study sought to answer the aforementioned research questions through an exploratory multiple case study design. Building off of a handful of studies (Berg et al., 2005; Fiarman, 2007; Margolis, 2008) which specifically examined second stage teachers' leadership roles, and adding the theoretical framework of basic psychological needs (Ryan & Deci, 2001), this study used individual semi-structured interviews to gather participant experiences on being a

classroom teacher and teacher leader, specifically serving as a mentor teacher, along with their perspectives of job satisfaction and basic psychological needs. The ultimate goal of this study was to develop an understanding of how these elements contribute to their decision to remain in the teaching profession.

A multiple case study design was chosen for this study to allow each participant to share his or her experiences and perceptions, which provided a deeper understanding of how each person reached the decision to remain in the teaching profession (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). The data analyzed in this study are from 15 participants, all of whom were classroom teachers in City Public Schools at the time of the interview, and all of whom had previously served or were currently serving as coaches for the Mid-Atlantic Teacher Residency Program. Data were analyzed using both deductive and inductive coding methods. Through this, I was able to not only highlight participant experiences of need fulfillment and job satisfaction, but also capture other experiences that influenced their career decisions.

### **Definition of Terms**

The following terms used throughout this study are defined:

*Attrition:* The phenomenon of teachers opting to leave the teaching profession prior to reaching retirement (Ingersoll, 2001)

*Autonomy:* One of the basic psychological needs; an individual's aspiration to have a certain amount of agency over decisions (Ryan & Deci, 2002)

*Competence:* One of the basic psychological needs; an individual's sense of effectiveness in a situation or action (Ryan & Deci, 2002)

*Job satisfaction:* An employee's positive thoughts and feelings toward his or her job (Saari & Judge, 2004)

*Mentor / Coach:* Used interchangeably, a teacher leadership role in which the teacher observes and provides feedback to a pre-service teacher with the goal of improving their teaching practice (Hart, 1995)

*Relatedness:* One of the basic psychological needs; an individual's need to feel connected to others (Ryan & Deci, 2002)

*Retention:* The phenomenon of teachers opting to stay in the teaching profession (Ingersoll, 2001)

*Second Stage Teacher:* A teacher who has tenure and has been teaching between four and 20 years (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2013)

*Teacher Leader:* An extra role taken on by a classroom teacher that in some way influences the instruction of students (Harris, 2005)

*Theory of basic psychological needs (BPN):* A sub-theory of self determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000) which explains motivation as being dependent on the fulfillment of three needs, autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Bauer & Mulder, 2006)

*Urban Teaching Environment:* Schools and school systems located in cities, typically serving minority majority student bodies from low socio-economic status homes (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017); other features include outdated facilities and resources, decisions made by those far removed from the classroom, and tenuous home lives of students (Shaffer, White, & Brown, 2018)

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

This review of literature examines existing studies on the topics of teacher career decisions, job satisfaction, teacher leadership, and basic psychological needs. The chapter begins with an overview of the literature search strategy. Next, it discusses the topic of teacher career decisions. The specific factors of urban teaching and level of experience are explored. Next, research on the topics of teacher job satisfaction and teacher leadership are discussed. Literature examining the theory of basic psychological needs and how this relates to teachers' career decisions is then discussed. This chapter concludes by describing how the information examined through these sections comes together to form the original conceptual framework for this qualitative study, which explored the topic of second stage teacher leaders' decisions to remain in the teaching profession.

### **Literature Search Overview**

The Virginia Commonwealth University library online search website was used to find existing literature pertinent to this study. Specific library databases, such as EBSCO, ERIC, ProQuest, and PsychINFO were used, as well as an overarching library search. Keywords used in the search included *teacher retention*, *teacher career decisions*, *basic psychological needs*, *job*

*satisfaction, attrition, teacher leadership, and career stages.* Additionally, the sources cited in relevant studies were searched for by title. Articles and dissertations examined for inclusion in this literature review were obtained directly through Virginia Commonwealth University or through inter-library loan. There is a large body of scholarly work examining the topic of teacher career decisions, with the greatest focus on attrition, examining the number of teachers who leave the profession as well as reasons for their departure, rather than retention, exploring reasons why teachers choose to stay in the profession. Teacher job satisfaction and basic psychological needs are the focus of fewer scholarly works, however there is a growing body of literature on each topic. Overall, no studies that include the three topics of teacher retention, job satisfaction, and the theory of basic psychological needs and how they related to a teacher's career stage or leadership position were found.

### **Teacher Career Decisions**

Over the course of a teacher's career, he or she will determine whether or not to remain in the profession, a decision guided by a variety of factors, including pre-service preparation, induction, work conditions, and career stage (Johnson, Berg, & Donaldson, 2005). These factors may be considered "push" factors, less than desirable working conditions, or "pull" factors, the lure of other job opportunities (Yonezawa, Jones, & Singer, 2011, p. 914). The career decision teachers make has been the topic of study for many researchers, with teacher retention, the decision to stay in the profession, often receiving less of an emphasis than teacher attrition, the decision to leave (Perrachione, Petersen, & Rosser, 2008). This is a very important topic of research; of the three and a half million schoolteachers in the United States (Snyder, de Brey, & Dillow, 2016), approximately 8% leave the profession each year (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). Nearly 50% of beginning teachers leave the profession within their first five



years (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003), and recent research has confirmed this, adding that in urban school districts, rates of attrition of early career teachers can range from 44% to 74% (Papay, Bacher-Hicks, Page, & Marinell, 2017).

The problem of teacher attrition does not only occur with beginning teachers, though. Teachers with four or more years of experience, sometimes referred to as the second stage of teaching (Donaldson, 2005; Kirkpatrick, 2007) are also at risk of leaving the profession (Eros, 2011; Fessler & Christensen, 1992). When these experienced teachers leave, they take with them the professional expertise they have developed, often resulting in a staff filled with relatively inexperienced teachers, which may negatively impact student achievement (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011; Ronfeldt, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2013). Additionally, the professional relationships they have developed with colleagues throughout their career will be affected as they leave. This may have a negative impact on the teachers who remain; staff collegiality has been associated with teacher learning, shared resources, and an overall boost to workplace wellbeing (Shah, 2012). The diminished professional relationships may also be detrimental to student achievement, as staff collegiality has been found to be related to student success (Bryk & Schneider, 2002). The high rates of teacher attrition and resulting negative consequences have led researchers, policy makers, and educational administrators to embark on studies in an effort to understand the career decisions teachers make.

### **Existing Models**

Understanding how to attract and retain public school teachers has long been a focus for many scholars and teacher educators. Cochran-Smith (2006) noted that historically, when shortages were discovered in the teaching workforce, attention turned to recruitment to solve the problem. However, in the late 1990s and early 2000s, scholars began to discuss the heart of the

issue of teacher shortages. Attrition was to blame for teacher shortages, not an increasing number of retirees or simply more students enrolling in school (e.g., Ingersoll, 2001, 2003). In her speech in 2006, Cochran-Smith summed up this new understanding of the problem of teacher shortages by saying, “It’s retention, stupid!” (p. 6). Fifty years prior to this statement, a scholar and teacher educator had the same understanding of the problem. In 1956, W. W. Charters, Jr. wrote a short article expressing the need to address the issue of teacher attrition through the recruitment of teacher candidates who would likely remain in the teaching profession. He explained that simply recruiting more individuals would not solve the problem of attrition; instead it might have the opposite effect if those being recruited were “only marginally committed to a teaching career” (Charters, 1956, pp. 253-254). Charters (1956) then called for research that could begin to identify factors that predict “professional longevity” (p. 254).

In the 1980s, researchers identified factors that contribute to a teacher’s decision to remain in the profession (e.g., Chapman, 1983; Chapman, 1984; Chapman & Green, 1986). After reviewing existing literature on the topic of teacher career decisions, Chapman (1983, 1984) created and tested a conceptual model showing various factors that may contribute to a teacher’s decision to remain. The factors included personal characteristics, initial commitment to teaching, pre-service preparation, experiences during the first year of the teaching career, how integrated professionally and socially the teacher felt, and job satisfaction. Testing the model through a survey of graduates of one teacher preparation program from various graduation years found an individual’s initial commitment to teaching and perceived quality of the first year of teaching to be very influential on his or her ultimate career decision. The model was again tested by Chapman and Green in 1984, providing further evidence of the influence of the factors. Although some factors were found to be stronger

predictors of teacher retention, the model indicates the reciprocal relationship of various factors. For example, the factor of integration into the profession, which included a professional component of having the necessary skillset and training as well as a social component of receiving recognition and approval of peers and superiors, both influenced and was influenced by job satisfaction; how integrated into the teaching profession an individual felt could influence his or her job satisfaction, and perceptions of job satisfaction could influence how integrated the individual felt. Several factors may also act as an influence on another factor. Chapman's model (1983) shows how perceptions of quality of the first year of teaching may be influenced by the pre-service preparation program, initial commitment to teaching, and various other components, such as school climate and other potential career opportunities.

A decade after Chapman published his work on developing a conceptual model of teacher retention, a new conceptual model was put forth. Similar to Chapman's criticism of scholarly work in the field, Billingsley (1993) examined literature on the topic of teacher career decisions and determined that there was still no cohesive way of studying the phenomenon. She built upon Chapman's model, creating her own, which included external factors (societal, economic, and institutional), personal factors (demographics and perceptions), and employment factors (teachers' professional qualifications, work conditions, commitment to the various levels in which the teacher works, and ability to be employed outside the teaching profession). From her examination of the literature, Billingsley (1993) found that each of these factors all play a role in a teacher's career decision.

While the two models differ from one another, both illustrate the large number of elements potentially associated with a teacher's ultimate decision to remain in or leave the teaching profession. Recent studies in the field continue to show that a teacher's career decision

may be based on numerous factors. In a meta-analysis of studies on teacher attrition, Borman and Dowling (2008) found teacher demographics and job qualifications, school organization and resources, and student characteristics to be the most influential categories of factors. Indeed, numerous aspects may influence a teacher's career decision (Reeves & Lowenhaupt, 2016), and those working in different locations may experience each aspect differently. Understanding factors that contribute to career decisions for specific groups of teachers, such as career stage and teaching environment, could provide valuable information toward the goal of improving teacher retention.

### **Career Stage**

Attrition of beginning teachers has been noted as an area of primary concern for many researchers (e.g., Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 2003; Ingersoll, 2003). However, there is research indicating that those beyond the beginning stage of teaching may also be at risk of leaving the career. With several years of experience, teachers may feel the pull of other career opportunities (Yonezawa, Jones, & Singer, 2011) either beyond their school system or beyond the teaching profession. Because teacher attrition does not only occur during the beginning stage of the career, and later attrition can have detrimental consequences, some researchers have set out to understand the specific stages of a teacher's career and characteristics of each. However, there currently is no single agreed-upon list of the stages of a teacher's career, though it is widely accepted that the first three years, typically culminating in tenure, form the beginning or novice stage of a teacher's career (Eros, 2011). Beyond these initial years, various scholars have detailed different stages or phases.

**Models of teacher career stages.** Pulling from existing literature at the time, one researcher detailed teachers' career stages and confirmed his ideas through a study in which he

had teachers themselves describe phases of their careers and themes that dominated the phases (Huberman, 1989). He described six stages of a teacher's career, and for each stage, he assigned years of experience; the first stage covers years one through three, and the final stage covers years 31 through 40. Important for this current study is Huberman's (1989) idea of an experimentation phase. He believed this was the stage in which the teacher evaluates where he or she is. A significant finding from his study was that each of the teachers reached a point in which he or she felt the need for a new challenge or a new level of excitement, which confirmed Huberman's (1989) idea of the experimentation stage of a teacher's career. The experimentation stage began several years in and was thought to stretch from year seven to around year 20. Teachers in this stage, particularly around the 12-year mark, tended to examine their career and determine whether or not they would continue in the profession. Huberman conducted his research in 1989, using Swiss teachers as his sample. Given the multitude of changes in society over the last several decades, as well as the cultural differences that may exist between Swiss and American schools, his levels of experience associated with each stage may not hold true with today's teaching workforce in the United States. Indeed, career switchers, or those who enter the teaching profession later in life, are more prevalent today, due in part to the increase in the number of alternative teacher education programs (Wilcox & Samaras, 2009). Additionally, it has been noted by some that the current generations of workers may differ significantly from previous generations (Margolis, 2008), with today's teachers seeking more opportunities for advancement and feeling less inclined to remain in the profession until retirement.

Some scholars consider teachers' career stages to be associated with the number of years a teacher has been teaching (e.g., Huberman, 1989); however others take a different approach. For example, Bressman, Winter, and Efron (2018) describe a more recent approach to identifying

stages of a teacher's career and explain that teachers have an early, mid-, and late-career stage; teachers may be in any stage, regardless of years of experience. Instead, each stage is associated with certain characteristics. Bressman and colleagues (2018) explain that in the early stage, teachers work to build confidence in instructional practices and mastery over the curriculum. In the mid stage, they have confidence in their instructional delivery, but seek new ways to challenge themselves and continue to grow as educators. Finally, in the late stage, teachers have developed an understanding of how the education of their students fits in to the larger society, and they develop a greater vision for what education means. Building off of the work of Huberman (1989), You and Conley (2015) also describe three career stages, each identified by the number of years the teacher has been in the profession. The authors explain that teachers may be in the novice stage, those with fewer than five years of experience, in the mid stage, those with five to 10 years of experience, or in the veteran stage, those with 11 or more years of experience. Unlike Bressman and colleagues (2018), they believe that the mid-career stage is when teachers are more committed to the profession, however in the veteran stage, teachers begin to consider other career options and whether or not teaching is the right career for them.

It is evident that different scholars have varying opinions on the stages of a teacher's career and what each stage holds. In an article about teacher career stages, Eros (2011) explained that while existing models do differ, "all the models agree on the existence of a first stage and a subsequent second stage" (p. 66). However, scholars take differing approaches to how they define the second stage. For some researchers, the second stage of the career may be associated with four to 10 years of experience (Inman & Marlow, 2004; Kirkpatrick, 2007); for others, it may be associated with any number of years beyond the first four (Donaldson, 2005) or six (Doan & Peters, 2009). Regardless of the level of experience associated with the second

stage of teaching, the literature indicates that this is a time in which teachers are vulnerable to leaving the profession.

**Second stage teachers.** While it is difficult to definitively state the number of years of experience that align with the second stage of teaching, it can be understood to begin with the fourth year of teaching, as tenure has been achieved at this point in the career. For some scholars, the second stage may extend through the tenth year (e.g., Inman & Marlow, 2004; Kirkpatrick, 2007), and for others, it may extend indefinitely (e.g., Doan & Peters, 2009; Donaldson, 2005). Additionally, Huberman's (1989) third stage of teaching, which he refers to as the experimentation phase, has characteristics that mirror those of the second stage, as discussed by other researchers (e.g., Bressman, Winter, & Efron, 2018; Doan & Peters, 2009; Donaldson, 2005).

Although existing models differ in the way they depict teacher career stages, there are important similarities found in the literature regarding the second stage of teaching. This time is filled with increased confidence in one's ability to deliver instruction and handle all aspects of the job (Bressman, Winter, & Efron, 2018; Eros, 2011). However, this increased confidence and competence does not mean that teachers at this stage do not need further development. Instead, researchers indicate that this stage is filled with the desire for greater challenges and continued improvement of the teaching practice (Bressman, Winter, & Efron, 2018; Eros, 2011). An article written for practitioners describes this time as the "seven year itch" (Doan & Peters, 2009, p. 18), and recommends that principals put forth effort to ensure that these teachers remain in the profession. Without continued growth and challenge, teachers in the second stage may feel the pull of other employment opportunities. Hargreaves and Fullan (2013) also discuss the importance of this often forgotten about group of teachers. Defining second stage teachers as

those with four to 20 years of experience, a definition also used by this current study, the authors state, “We need to focus more on the teachers in the middle and to keep challenging and stretching them” (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2013, p. 38). Although not widely studied, and often overlooked, this critical stage in the teaching career has received some attention from scholars.

**Research findings regarding second stage teachers.** Kirkpatrick and Johnson (2014) explain that the novice stage of a teacher’s career is filled with excitement and engagement as the new teacher works to develop pedagogical competencies. Once a teacher has moved beyond this initial stage, he or she often feels more confident and is largely left alone (Kirkpatrick & Johnson, 2014). In an exploratory study conducted to understand how second stage teachers, those with four to 10 years of experience, engaged with their work, Kirkpatrick and Johnson (2014) found that all 12 study participants expressed a different type of engagement in their work when compared to the novice stage of their careers. Participants noted that they did not have to prove themselves as they had during their novice period and were left on their own to determine how best to approach their work. “There was little evidence in their accounts that anyone within their school considered or guided their development as teachers” (Kirkpatrick & Johnson, 2014, p. 247), and noted that although they appreciated the autonomy, many felt they were not being given feedback to help improve their practice; some even felt a sense of isolation. Although this hands-off approach from administration led some teachers in the study to become detached from the profession, others sought learning opportunities on their own, with many taking on leadership roles outside of the classroom, such as advising a club, volunteering with an educational organization, or acting as a mentor to new or student teachers.

In a different study of second stage teachers, researchers found that participation in a professional development program was connected to teachers’ decisions to continue in the



profession (Yonezawa, Jones, & Singer, 2011). Yonezawa and colleagues (2011) focused on six urban teachers who participated in a professional development program about writing in an effort to understand if and how participation in the program helped them continue their careers in the challenging urban environments in which they worked. Participants indicated that their participation in the program provided them with increased competence, collegial support, and ability to use the skills they had developed to tackle new roles in their schools and districts.

Similar to Kirkpatrick and Johnson's (2014) finding that second stage teachers desired feedback to improve their practice, but felt isolated, Bressman, Winter, and Efron (2018) conducted a study on the topic of teacher mentoring and found that second stage teachers would be interested in being mentored. Although mentoring is typically associated with the novice stage of teaching, these second stage teachers explained that having a mentor would provide a way for them to receive feedback on their practice, which they desire, but rarely receive at this stage of their career. Beyond the feedback to improve their practice, these second stage teachers shared that the relationship formed between mentor and mentee was important, and many reported having formed close relationships with colleagues that they were able to call upon for guidance (Bressman et al., 2018).

Several qualitative studies focusing on different aspects of the work lives of second stage teachers were presented in 2007 at the American Educational Research Association's conference (e.g., Charner-Laird, 2007; Fiarman, 2007; Kirkpatrick, 2007; Szczesiul, 2007). Some of the researchers noted the difficulty involved with finding second stage teachers, as the majority of teachers in the schools they visited were novice or veteran teachers (Fiarman, 2007; Kirkpatrick, 2007), providing anecdotal evidence that teachers in this career stage are also at risk of attrition. Similar to previously discussed literature, it was found that teachers in the second stage

feel quite competent, but still want to improve their practice (Charner-Laird, 2007; Kirkpatrick, 2007). Kirkpatrick (2007) explained that because these second stage teachers were competent in classroom management and instructional delivery, they had time to focus on other facets of their jobs or personal lives; for some, this meant becoming less engaged in the profession as they were pulled away by other commitments or a general lack of inspiration in the job. In her study regarding the professional development of second stage teachers, Charner-Laird (2007) found that while they felt confident in their abilities, teachers in this stage desired collegiality and feedback that could help them further improve their instructional delivery, a finding that aligns with the research of Kirkpatrick and Johnson (2014) and Bressman, Winter, and Efron (2018). Szczesiul (2007) also found collegiality to be important in her study of second stage teachers; while they were not often given opportunities to make their own instructional decisions, when they did have the opportunity, the second stage teachers enjoyed working together to plan for instruction. Although they did not all intend to be classroom teachers until they retire, providing second stage teachers with meaningful professional development was found to increase their commitment to the profession for the time being and even help them think about other ways they may continue careers in the field of education beyond the classroom (Charner-Laird, 2007).

Szczesiul (2007) examined autonomy of second stage teachers, those with four to eight years of experience, in her study of urban middle school teachers. Setting out to explore how teachers in this district with numerous academic initiatives in place thought of autonomy in their work, she interviewed ten teachers using a semi-structured protocol. Szczesiul (2007) found that while teachers felt competent in their ability to effectively deliver instruction to their students, they had little say in what or even how they taught. However, teachers in the study were not opposed to the lack of autonomy they were given, perhaps due in part to not having experienced

greater autonomy during their teaching careers. Kirkpatrick (2007) even found that teachers participating in her study believed there should be a little more guidance and a little less autonomy, as some teachers in this stage stopped being fully invested in the teaching career and tended to not put forth as much effort. While Szczesiul (2007) researched urban teachers, Kirkpatrick (2007) researched suburban teachers; the contextual differences may explain the level of freedom given.

Fiarman (2007) also studied suburban second stage teachers. In her study, teachers were given the opportunity to move into leadership roles outside of the classroom for a limited amount of time before moving back into a teaching or other school-based role. Similar to Charner-Laird's (2007) finding that second stage teachers wanted to improve their practice, Fiarman (2007) found that one of the most important aspects of taking on a leadership role was developing new competencies. Additionally, collegiality was an important theme in Fiarman's (2007) study. Like other studies of second stage teachers (e.g., Bressman, Winter, & Efron, 2018; Charner-Laird, 2007; Kirkpatrick & Johnson, 2014; Szczesiul, 2007), participants in Fiarman's (2007) study shared their desire for collegial relationships, but indicated that their role as a teacher leader outside of the school often prevented them from feeling as though they were a part of a community.

Although a decade has passed since much of this research was presented, second-stage teachers are still at risk for attrition, perhaps even more so due to ever increasing accountability measures in teaching as well as a more widespread acceptance of career mobility. Research focused on this specific group of teachers is as important today as it was in 2007. Studying second-stage teachers will provide an important contribution to scholarly research, as "although

much is now known about the effective induction of new teachers, the experiences and choices of second-stage teachers...remain largely unstudied” (Kirkpatrick & Johnson, 2014, p. 249).

**Conclusion.** While models of teachers’ career stages differ across the literature, there is a growing understanding that beyond the novice or beginning phase, teachers are still vulnerable to leaving the profession. Second stage teachers in particular, those with more than three years of experience, but not yet close to retirement from the profession, are particularly at risk. Teachers in this stage experience competence and confidence in their job skills, however they desire greater challenges and continued growth in their practice. Other career opportunities, either in or out of the teaching profession, and family obligations may pull these experienced and talented teachers away from their jobs. Although second stage teachers in all work environments may face opportunities and other factors that could potentially pull them from their work as a classroom teacher, those working in the urban environment may face even greater challenges that must be weighed as they make their career decisions.

### **Teaching in the Urban Environment**

Urban teachers are often the focus of research on teachers’ career decisions. This is not surprising, as research has explained that urban schools face higher rates of attrition than their suburban counterparts (Darling-Hammond, 2003; Ingersoll, 2003), with as many as 74% of beginning teachers in urban schools leaving the profession (Papay, Bacher-Hicks, Page, & Marinell, 2017). Although the term urban is technically defined by population density, there is no one accepted definition of urban in the field of education (Milner, 2012). Instead, researchers and practitioners in the field of education have a broader understanding of the definition of urban (Schaffer, White, & Brown, 2018). Urban schools typically serve low-income, minority majority student bodies, demographic features that have been associated with high rates of teacher

turnover (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). Additionally, many of these urban schools that serve underprivileged populations receive Title I funds from the federal government. In their recent report on teacher turnover, Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2017) provided data on attrition rates in Title I schools. Overall, attrition rates for Title I schools are higher than their non-Title I counterparts. Interestingly, turnover rates are lower for novice teachers in Title I schools, however they are much higher for second stage teachers working in Title I schools than in non-Title I schools. This further illustrates the point that teacher attrition is not just a problem for beginning teachers. Those with experience, particularly experience in urban hard-to-staff schools, may also leave the school district or profession.

Working to understand the reasons behind the high attrition rates in urban school districts, researchers have identified numerous factors associated with teacher attrition. These “push” factors (Yonezawa, Jones, & Singer, 2011, p. 914) found in the urban teaching environment may lead to teachers seeking to move away from negative aspects associated with teaching in this context. While suburban and rural teachers may also experience these factors throughout the course of their career, the higher rates of turnover in these urban districts do indicate that more focus should be given to understanding how teachers make their career decisions in these hard-to-staff locations. Within the urban context, it may also be important to give specific attention to experienced teachers to understand how they navigate the challenges of the profession, which may ultimately provide practitioners with the information they need to retain these seasoned professionals and their expertise. Factors such as resources, relationships with colleagues and administrators, and the student body have been found to play a role in urban teachers’ career decisions (e.g., Brill & McCartney, 2008; Brunetti, 2006; Hudley, 2013; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011).

**Administrative support.** One of the components often noted in the literature as playing a role in teachers' career decisions is school leadership. School administrators are responsible for much more than overseeing the day-to-day operations of the building. Principals who are deemed effective by scholars "create an orderly school environment, are responsive to teachers' concerns, and provide instructional leadership" through consistent, regular feedback focused on the teacher's practice (Johnson, Kraft, & Papay, 2012). In fact, having a supportive administrator has been associated with improvement in teacher effectiveness, as measured by student test data (Kraft & Papay, 2014). The importance of a school's administrator is obvious. However, when school administrators are unable or unwilling to meet the responsibilities of effective leadership, teachers take notice.

Many teachers cite problems with administration as being their primary reason for the decision to leave the profession (Brill & McCartney, 2008). Johnson and colleagues (2012) found that supportive administration was one of the most important work conditions that predicted a teacher's career plans. This was supported by a recent research report that found administrative support to still be the most predictive factor in a teacher's career decision (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). In fact, one of the components contributing to high rates of early career attrition is a perceived lack of support from school administration (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). Because of this, administrators might focus more of their attention on novice teachers.

However, scholarship indicates that while this may be beneficial for novice teachers, it may ultimately be a problem for other staff members. As administrators focus their time and attention on supporting novice teachers as well as hiring and training new teachers to fill the ever-present vacancies in urban schools, they are unable to provide instructional support to other

faculty members (Eros, 2011). This may cause second stage teachers to feel unsupported by administrators, driving them to either continue teaching and feel detached or leave teaching altogether (Kirkpatrick & Johnson, 2014). Although administrators may not focus as much on second stage teachers nor those closer to retirement, these seasoned professionals still value input and guidance from their principals. As previously discussed, second stage teachers want to continue to improve their practice by receiving meaningful feedback from their administrators (Bressman, Winter, & Efron, 2018; Charner-Laird, 2007; Eros, 2011). Administrative support can indeed help teachers be successful in their career. Day and Gu (2009) presented vignettes of two veteran teachers, those with more than 24 years of experience, as part of a larger study examining resilience and commitment in teachers. Each of the teachers portrayed expressed how the school's leadership helped them navigate the changes in the education system and the students they serve (Day & Gu, 2009).

Having a supportive administrator is a key factor in developing and training effective teachers. However, it should be noted that focusing solely on administrative support is challenging in educational research, as this is one component of the overall school climate; supportive administrators are often found in schools that also have high levels of staff collegiality and fewer issues with student discipline (Johnson, Kraft, & Papay, 2012). In the urban teaching environment, there are often numerous challenges that must be handled, and the building administrator may be pulled in many directions at once. What may seem like a simple lack of administrative support may in fact be larger issues with discipline, testing, or the school building itself. In an effort to tackle these problems, the administrator may not be able to provide the support the teachers want and need. Although teachers in urban schools often experience a lack of administrator support, regardless of the underlying reason, there may be

other ways in which they can feel supported, one of which is through strong collegiality among the staff members.

**Collegiality.** Teaching can be an isolating career; a teacher spends his or her workday in the classroom with children, separated from other adults in the building. Although forming relationships with the students is the backbone of the career and can be fulfilling, developing relationships with fellow teachers is a key factor in many teachers' career decisions. This collegiality, which can include anything from simple social interactions with peers to collaborative instructional planning (Ford & Youngs, 2018), can help a teacher feel less isolated in his or her work life. Collegiality in education can also provide a means for furthering a teacher's practice, allow for the exchange of ideas, and help relieve stress (Brill & McCartney, 2008). Buchanan et al. (2013) explained that collegiality among teachers can improve morale overall, and when teachers believe the climate of the school is positive, they are more likely to remain teaching (Johnson, Kraft, & Papay, 2012). Johnson and Birkeland (2003) also found that for schools in which staff collegiality was a top priority, retention rates were greater. The collegiality of the staff is not only associated with greater retention; in schools with greater socialization and collaboration among the staff, students have greater academic gains (Kraft & Papay, 2014).

Collegiality may be somewhat challenging to come by for teachers working in the urban school environment. Similar to issues of support from administrators, in which high rates of teacher turnover affect the ability of administrators to provide support, high rates of teacher turnover may affect collegiality, which may then affect teachers' career decisions. Darling-Hammond (2003) explains that experienced teachers may be "stretched thin" (p. 8) because they are called upon to perform extra duties given the constant turnover in staff. Collegiality also



requires trust of one's fellow teachers, however, the constant newness of a large portion of staff members may make this impossible. Additionally, urban teachers experience higher rates of absenteeism (Bruno, 2002). When teachers in urban schools are absent, substitutes are often hard to come by. Again, this leads to other teachers in the building being called upon to take on extra responsibilities. This increased workload may not provide time for collegiality and relationship building among the staff.

Also present in many urban schools is an undercurrent of negativity. This negativity stems from numerous factors, and some degree of commiseration may be necessary and healthy. However, those teachers who are focused on continuing to learn and grow in their careers and do not want to partake in negative talk may then feel isolated from their peers. This can then lead to the decision to leave the profession, as was found by Gallant and Riley (2014). The researchers collected data from former teachers who were asked to write narratives regarding their decision to leave the profession; participants described how an overall negative school climate, and the lack of staff collegiality that accompanied it, was an important factor in the decision to leave teaching (Gallant & Riley, 2014).

Because attrition rates of beginning teachers are high, many schools and systems work to ensure that these novices have experiences different from the participants in the study by Gallant and Riley (2014). Though not required by all states or localities, there is often a mentorship program or some form of new teacher group for those just beginning in the profession (DeAngelis, Wall, & Che, 2013). As a teacher achieves tenure and moves beyond the novice stage, these supports may be taken away. Without the collegiality of fellow teachers, this may leave a second stage teacher feeling isolated and unhappy, which may be detrimental to their future in the profession. Researchers have found collegiality to be more important for second

stage teachers than those in the novice stage (Inman & Marlow, 2004). However, this finding may simply reflect the fact that novice teachers do have supports built in, while second stage teachers may not.

Stanford (2001) also found that collegiality was a very important factor in her study of urban elementary teachers with 10 or more years of experience. Each of the study's participants expressed that the thing they liked the most about teaching in the environment in which they did was their fellow teachers. They explained that they have strong, supportive relationships with their colleagues, and that they would turn to them first to share positive news about their work or to seek advice. These teachers shared that they felt a sense of family when they were working alongside their colleagues (Stanford, 2001). Although collegiality within the school building is an important factor in a teacher's decision to remain in the profession, some may find the collegial support they need with teachers outside of the school. In one study, urban teachers participating in a national professional development organization explained that they did not feel a sense of collegiality and community within their school buildings (Yonezawa, Jones, & Singer, 2011). However, participation in the program connected them with like-minded individuals, a factor they believe helped them continue in the profession.

**Students.** While collegiality among staff members can contribute greatly to a teacher's decision to remain in the profession, one of the primary reasons given for longevity in the career in studies of teacher retention is the students (Battle & Looney, 2014; Bennett, Brown, Kirby-Smith, & Severson, 2013; Brunetti, 2006; Perrachione, Petersen, & Rosser, 2008; Stanford, 2001). Teachers enter the career because they have an interest in working with students, whether their plans are to remain in the classroom until retirement or transition to a different position within education. Often, though, their love of the students cannot make up for the challenges of

the profession. The students themselves can even become a factor that leads to the decision to leave the profession. This is particularly true in the urban environment, where the students may have needs beyond academics. They may need additional support from adults in the school building, as urban youth can experience challenges from home and community in terms of poverty, lack of adequate resources, and violence (Brunetti, 2006).

Urban schools often serve student populations made up of racial minorities from low-income households (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). Research has shown these demographic features to be associated with higher rates of teacher attrition (Boyd et al., 2011). Teachers have also indicated their decision to leave is due, at least in part, to student discipline issues (Ingersoll, 2001; Ingersoll & Smith, 2003). Urban schools report more frequent disciplinary incidents than do suburban or rural schools (Flynn et al., 2016). While there is a growing body of literature examining the racial disproportionality involved in the handling of student discipline issues, such as suspensions and expulsions (e.g., Flynn et al., 2016), scholars have noted that when discipline issues are swiftly handled by administration, decreasing the number of future problems, teachers are more likely to remain in the profession (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). As noted previously though, administrative support in urban schools is often lacking, which may contribute to other issues, such as student behavior, becoming larger. Student behavioral issues may not only contribute to teachers' decisions to leave; discipline issues may also be caused by the constant turnover in staff. Replacing experienced teachers with novice teachers who do not have the same skill level in terms of classroom management and instructional delivery will likely contribute to a decline in student behavior and achievement. Likewise, the constant newness of teachers interferes with collegiality, which inhibits staff

members presenting a unified, consistent message to students, causing the cycle of poor student behavior and teacher turnover to continue.

In addition to behavior problems, student achievement has also been associated with teachers' career decisions (Guin, 2004; Boyd, Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2005), and students in urban schools often come to school less academically ready than their suburban peers (Bruno, 2002). In an examination of teachers in New York City public schools, researchers found that teachers who worked in schools with lower achieving populations of students were more likely to leave the school or the profession (Boyd, Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2005). The high rates of teacher absenteeism (Bruno, 2002) and turnover in urban schools often mean that students are being instructed by unqualified teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2003), which further exacerbates the problem of student achievement. Likewise, students' motivation for learning declines when there is a disruption to the learning environment, such as frequent teacher absences or other staffing and scheduling changes. Hanushek, Kain, and Rivkin (2004) also explain that working with a student population that underperforms others academically is strongly associated with attrition. However, the researchers went on to explain that earning a greater salary while working with lower achieving students may increase rates of teacher retention. Darling-Hammond (2003) also described salary as playing a role in a teacher's career decision and explained how salary combined with other factors, such as student achievement and workload lead a teacher to determine his or her career path. This illustrates the complex nature of teachers' career decisions and the numerous factors that are weighed to reach the decision.

The interconnectedness of student discipline and achievement, administrative support, collegiality, and overall climate of the school makes it difficult to say with any certainty that these individual factors are the reason teachers leave urban schools. In their quantitative study of

statewide data, Johnson, Kraft, and Papay (2012) explained that teachers making a career decision may find it challenging to “distinguish between problems caused by students and problems resulting from a dysfunctional work environment” (p. 27) because perceptions of negative work conditions are often associated with low student performance. Additionally, Johnson and colleagues (2012) found that student achievement was greater in schools in which teachers perceived a positive climate and work conditions. The authors explained that having a consistent staff, with everyone holding the same expectations for student behavior and achievement, can make a difference not only in the feel of the school’s climate, but also in the outcomes for the students.

**Professional development opportunities.** Related to teachers’ perceptions of student achievement and behavior is perceptions of their own ability to instruct the students and manage their classrooms. One of the contributing factors in a teacher’s decision to stay or leave is whether or not they feel capable of effectively providing instruction to their students (Hong, 2010). School systems provide professional development to teachers in an effort to help them continually grow in their practice, which can then help them feel more capable. Researchers explain that providing quality professional development in the urban environment is necessary to help these teachers continue to develop the skills required to effectively teach the students in these challenging schools (Oakes, Franke, Quartz, & Rogers, 2002). Ensuring that teachers have the necessary skills to effectively deliver instruction to diverse learners who may not come to school with the same background knowledge as their suburban peers is a paramount factor in student achievement (Darling-Hammond, 2003). Additionally, feeling confident in one’s ability to perform the job of teaching plays a role in the decision to remain in or leave the profession.

Teachers have indicated that professional development opportunities are one facet of the career that may keep them in hard-to-staff urban classrooms (Greenlee & Brown, 2009). Researchers found that useful professional development opportunities in both content area and classroom management strategies were predictive of teachers' career decisions (Ingersoll & May, 2012). Unfortunately, urban schools often are unable to provide meaningful professional development to teachers (Johnson & Birkeland, 2003). This may be due to a school- or district-wide focus on a topic dictated by test scores and accreditation issues. In some instances, teacher professional development is determined by those in power beyond the school or school system. If this is the case, what is offered may not be what individual teachers need. Urban schools also tend to have problems that require immediate focus, such as student misbehavior and absenteeism. If school leaders' focus is on handling these larger problems, professional development may not be a priority. However providing teachers with meaningful professional development that addresses some of the underlying issues in the school may be beneficial across the board. For example, in a study of professional development focused on classroom management strategies in New York City's public schools, researchers found that not only did teachers gain valuable skills and knowledge, but they were able to implement changes, leading to a decrease in the number of behavior incidents (Flynn et al., 2016).

An additional problem with professional development, particularly in the urban environment, is that much of it is designed with novice teachers in mind. Because of the high rates of turnover in urban school systems, professional development programs often must focus on training new teachers (Brill & McCartney, 2008). As a result, the professional development programs offered do not provide second stage teachers with meaningful content (Bressman, Winter, & Efron, 2018; Eros, 2011). While these second stage teachers are believed to have a

certain level of competence and confidence in their teaching practice (Kirkpatrick & Johnson, 2014), they could still benefit from professional development opportunities designed for teachers beyond the novice phase. Because professional development in the urban environment is often not meaningful for second stage teachers, some seek opportunities for growth beyond the school system (e.g., Yonezawa, Jones, & Singer, 2011) and then bring what they have learned back into the urban classroom. Not being provided with ongoing development may be a reason others decide to leave. Researchers in Los Angeles created a program to provide ongoing professional development to urban teachers (Oakes, Franke, Quartz, & Rogers, 2002); many teachers who participated in their program shared that they would not have continued teaching in the urban environment had it not been for the professional support they provided.

**Resources and facilities.** In addition to relationships with administrators, co-workers, and students and professional development opportunities, the resources available to teachers may contribute to their career decisions. Resources can be anything from classroom technology to textbooks to math manipulatives. Darling-Hammond (2003) describes a study of teacher attrition she and her colleagues were in the process of conducting in California. She explains that more important than student demographics, working conditions, including the availability of resources, influenced teachers' career decisions. In a study of early career teachers, participants explained that having shared resources with other teachers may play a role in the decision to continue teaching (Burke, Aubusson, Schuck, Buchanan, & Prescott, 2015). In fact, the researchers found that those who intended to leave the profession within the next year felt as though they had a lack of resources and were unable to share them with colleagues due to a sense of isolation (Burke et al., 2015).

Teachers everywhere may experience a lack of resources, however the problem is much more pronounced in the urban environment. Hudley (2013) explains that teachers working in urban, high-poverty schools typically “report having to work with outdated textbooks...outdated computers... and inadequate or nonexistent science equipment, materials and labs” (para. 3). Deficient or non-existent resources may affect what and how a teacher is able to teach. This is problematic because teachers enter the profession likely having received training that utilizes resources and creates certain expectations for the experience of teaching. Researchers have found that teachers are more likely to make the decision to leave the profession if there is a mismatch between the expectations one has and the reality of the job (Gallant & Riley, 2014). Additionally, the lack of resources in the urban environment can lead to greater achievement gaps. As previously discussed, students in the urban environment may begin school with less academic readiness (Bruno, 2002). A lack of resources simply serves to further the already existing achievement gap.

Beyond resources, the facilities themselves may play a role in a teacher’s decision to stay or leave. While poor conditions of schools have been examined in developing nations, some researchers have noted that the study of this is also important in school districts in the United States, “particularly in large, urban school districts where facility quality is often poor” (Buckley, Schneider, & Shang, 2004, p. 1). Often in urban districts, the facilities are lacking, with leaks, insufficient temperature control, and even mold. Buckley and colleagues (2004) used data from a survey of teachers in Washington, D.C., a large urban school district to examine whether teachers’ perceptions of the quality of facilities was related to their intent to remain teaching at their school. They found that the condition of the school building itself has a significant impact on a teacher’s decision to remain, with perceptions of poor facilities being related to a teacher’s



intent to leave. The researchers even explain that improving the conditions of the school building, (lighting, temperature, air quality, etc.) may be more beneficial in improving teacher retention than increasing pay for teachers (Buckley et al., 2004).

## **Conclusion**

Scholarly research details the challenges faced by teachers in urban schools. The multitude of factors that influence a teacher's career decision, as described by Chapman (1983), Billingsley (1993), Borman and Dowling (2008), and others, are all at play in the urban environment. Researchers have indicated that the decision to leave the teaching profession is typically not based on one single event or factor, rather the decision is the culmination of numerous factors (Day & Gu, 2009; Gallant & Riley, 2014). In addition to work factors influencing the decision, a teacher's career stage may also play a role. Because of the quantitative nature of much of the existing research on teachers' career decisions, it is difficult to fully understand how teachers experience conditions in the workplace and how they then make their career decisions based on these experiences (Jones & Youngs, 2012). While there are numerous factors that may lead to teacher attrition, particularly in urban school districts, some teachers do face these factors and decide to stay. Understanding how this decision is reached is an important first step in improving retention rates for urban teachers.

For some, the initial commitment to teaching may simply be strong; Rinke (2011) found that entering the profession with a goal of being fully integrated and continuing to grow and learn over the years can act as a buffer when circumstances are less than ideal. Beginning a career in the profession with an understanding of urban school systems may also prepare an individual to remain. New teachers who had student taught in or attended urban schools as students indicated that they were more likely to continue teaching in an urban school than were

their peers without the previous experiences (Whipp & Geronime, 2017). It is important to note that both Rinke (2011) and Whipp and Geronime (2017) focused on beginning teachers in their studies. Although commitment to teach in an urban school setting may provide an explanation for the longevity of some teachers, it may be useful to consider other potential reasons for the decision to remain. Examining this from the perspective of second stage teachers can provide insight into how they have made and continue to make the decision to remain teaching in the urban environment.

Research on employee career longevity may provide one potential path to understanding the decision to remain. Research indicates that job satisfaction, or an overall enjoyment of one's job, may contribute to an individual's decision to remain in his or her profession. Teaching is one such profession in which job satisfaction may make a difference in an individual's career decision. In fact, job satisfaction has been found to act as a buffer between school- and system-level factors that tend to push people away from a career in teaching and a teacher's career decision (You & Conley, 2015). Because of this, it is essential to include job satisfaction in a study of teacher retention.

### **Job Satisfaction**

Research indicates that an employee's sense of job satisfaction, or overall positive feeling toward his or her work (Judge, Weiss, Kammeyer-Mueller, & Hulin, 2017) is a key factor in the employee's career decision (Kumar, Dass, & Topaloglu, 2014). Bogler (2002) explains, "It is important to study teacher job satisfaction because of its effect on teacher retention" (p. 666). Indeed, researchers have found connections between teachers' job satisfaction and their decision to remain in or leave the profession. Ingersoll and Smith (2003) analyzed national survey data and found that job dissatisfaction was a leading reason teachers indicated for their decision to

leave the profession. Other researchers have also found teachers' job satisfaction to be related to career decisions. Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2011) found that a lack of job satisfaction predicted a teacher's motivation to leave the profession in their study of Norwegian elementary and middle school teachers.

While it is important to understand how job satisfaction, or a feeling of dissatisfaction may contribute to a teacher's decision to stay or leave, it is equally important to understand what contributes to this sense of satisfaction. A teacher's feeling of satisfaction in his or her work may be related to any number of variables. Each of the factors contributing to a teacher's career decision that were previously discussed may also contribute to a teacher's overall sense of job satisfaction. In their analysis of a national dataset, Ingersoll and Smith (2003) found teachers' job dissatisfaction to be the result of a variety of factors, including a lack of support from administrators and issues with student discipline, two characteristics that are often present in the urban teaching environment. In a study of Canadian teachers, administrative control was also the primary factor in teachers' sense of job satisfaction (Ma & MacMillan, 1999).

Although research does often focus on ways in which job satisfaction is diminished, there is literature that identifies factors that increase job satisfaction. Perceptions of positive overall work conditions have been associated with an increased sense of job satisfaction (Johnson, Kraft, & Papay, 2012). Johnson and colleagues (2012) noted the most important elements of a positive work environment were staff collegiality and a supportive administrator. Greater satisfaction with one's job was also connected with the intent to remain in the profession.

An increased sense of job satisfaction may also be connected to the work the teacher does. In a study of urban novice teachers, those with fewer than three years of experience, it was found that their sense of preparedness for the job was the most important predictor of their job

satisfaction (Green & Munoz, 2016). The measure of preparedness was based on several survey items, all of which focused on providing instruction and maintaining the classroom learning environment, the teaching component of the teaching profession. This seems to indicate that teachers who feel as though they are capable of handling the actual job of teaching may experience greater satisfaction. This may not only apply to early career teachers, though. In her qualitative study of second stage teachers, Kirkpatrick (2007) found that teachers felt a greater sense of satisfaction in and engagement with their jobs when they were doing “the teaching part of teaching” (p. 10). Research focusing on how the work teachers do contributes to their feeling of job satisfaction, and ultimately to their career decisions could prove very useful for both scholars and practitioners.

In an urban environment, this line of research could begin to explain why, with attrition rates being so very high, some teachers choose to remain. Although urban schools may be filled with challenges, teachers who continue their careers in urban school districts indicate that they feel some level of job satisfaction that compels them to continue teaching (Stanford, 2001). One important question then is how do teachers experience job satisfaction? Second stage urban teachers who make the career decision to remain likely face the same challenging circumstances as those who make the decision to leave. Those who stay may feel a sense of job satisfaction regardless of the challenges the urban environment presents. Their job satisfaction may safeguard them from the negative work conditions, allowing them to make the decision to remain in the profession (You & Conley, 2015). Because of this, it is important for research to continue examining job satisfaction, its antecedents, and consequences. Looking at how teachers experience job satisfaction can provide a framework for understanding what may contribute to these teachers’ continued decisions to remain in teaching.

## **Teacher Leadership**

One of the factors believed to potentially influence a teacher's job satisfaction as well as his or her decision to remain in the teaching profession is taking on extra leadership roles within the school and larger school system. Because teaching is a career that does not offer a great deal of upward mobility (Reeves & Lowenhaupt, 2016), one way for teachers to continue to grow in their professional role is to assume new responsibilities beyond that of the classroom teacher. Although the definition of teacher leadership varies across the literature, each ultimately influences the instruction of students, whether directly or indirectly (Harris, 2005). There is also typically a relationship component to teacher leadership roles, as they involve working alongside other professionals. In a review of literature on the topic of teacher leadership, York-Barr and Duke (2004) explained that in part, teacher leadership initiatives grew out of the desire to "attract and retain intellectually talented individuals" (p. 256) by increasing the professionalism in the teaching career. Leadership positions may increase professionalism through increasing collaboration and providing career ladders for teachers (Berry, 2019). These leadership positions may be grade level or department chair, lead content teacher for the school or district, head of a committee, or mentor to novice and student teachers. Historically, literature indicated that teachers sought leadership roles later in their careers (Huberman, 1989), however new research indicates that teachers may desire these positions early in their careers (Margolis, 2008; Reeves & Lowenhaupt, 2016). The current generation of teachers differs from their predecessors in how they view their career in teaching (Cochran-Smith, 2006; Donaldson, 2005), and seeking out leadership roles early in their career may be influential in their decision to stay in the profession.

Researchers have described the changing landscape of teacher leadership, explaining that in today's high stakes testing environment in which attrition rates are high and the amount of

work is great, teachers with fewer years of experience are being asked to step up as leaders (Donaldson et al., 2008). Some scholars even call for second stage teachers to be tapped as teacher leaders. Doan and Peters (2009) explain that these teachers are young and capable and will be able to continue teaching while taking on this extra role. Allowing second stage teachers to assume leadership roles may prove beneficial to everyone involved. Donaldson and colleagues (2008) explain that these leadership roles “hold the potential not only to increase the instructional capacity of schools, but also to enhance second-stage teachers’ satisfaction and promote their retention” (p. 1092).

In an article written for a practitioner journal, Arnett (2017) explained that retaining quality teachers beyond the initial stage of teaching is as important as ensuring the success of novice teachers. She went on to explain that providing second stage teachers with leadership roles and training them to mentor new teachers may increase their job satisfaction and their retention in the profession (Arnett, 2017). Others consider mentoring to be a form of teacher leadership (e.g., Dozier, 2007; Gul, Kadir, & Criswell, 2019; Hart, 1995). As mentors, teachers observe pre-service or novice teachers and provide feedback to help them improve their practice, and through this leadership role, many will experience greater income and influence in the school and beyond (Hart, 1995). In their essay describing reasons for teacher attrition and potential solutions to the problem, Brill and McCartney (2008) shared that allowing veteran teachers to serve as mentors to novice teachers benefits the mentors as much as the novice teachers. They explained, “These programs treat teachers like the professionals that they are and that we hope they will continue to be” (Brill & McCartney, 2008, p. 772).

Reeves and Lowenhaupt (2016) found that pre-service teachers who have not yet begun their careers in teaching also desire leadership roles fairly early in their careers. They explain

that this may be due to the new generation of teachers having a different perspective on the career than previous generations. Given the increased educational attainment of this new generation of teachers, providing them with leadership roles in a profession that has “a perceived lack of vertical mobility” (Reeves & Lowenhaupt, 2016, p. 177), will meet their desire for an intellectual challenge and provide an alternative to a career spent entirely in the classroom, which pre-service teachers in their study did not want.

In addition to providing a means for career growth, and a potential alternative to switching careers (Cochran-Smith, 2006), leadership roles may prove beneficial in other ways. Being a mentor to novice teachers may provide a welcome challenge to second stage teachers and rekindle their excitement for teaching (Darling-Hammond, 2003). Scholars have indicated that factors often connected to teacher retention, such as collaboration, autonomy, and professional development, are experienced by teacher leaders (Daukas & White, 2010). Research indicates that those serving in the mentoring role develop new skills, including being more reflective (Gul, Kadir, & Criswell, 2019), become part of a larger professional community (Molitor, Parker, & Vetter, 2018), and improve their own classroom teaching practice (Jaspers, Meijer, Prins, & Wubbels, 2014). As such, it stands to reason that teachers who take on a leadership role such as mentoring may have experiences that influence their decision to remain in the profession. Similarly, taking on leadership roles may increase a teacher’s feeling of satisfaction in his or her job (Berg et al., 2005), a factor that may ultimately play a role in a teacher’s decision to remain in the profession. Given that teachers in the second stage of their career are the likely candidates for leadership positions, there is a growing body of research that specifically examines second stage teachers in leadership roles.

## **Research on Second Stage Teacher Leadership**

In a study conducted through the Project on the Next Generation of Teachers, researchers sought an understanding of the experiences of second stage teachers' leadership roles. Berg et al. (2005) conducted individual interviews with 20 second-stage teacher leaders to gather data on why the teachers accepted the leadership roles, what the roles were like, and whether they experienced a sense of satisfaction through serving as teacher leaders. Each participant had between three and 11 years of experience as a classroom teacher, and their leadership roles varied from lead teacher to literacy coach to content area coordinator. The researchers found that second stage teachers who took on leadership roles did so because of a "desire to make a difference in education" (Berg et al., 2005, p. 11), a finding that held true regardless of the leadership role the teacher assumed. When the teachers did feel as though they were making a difference through this leadership role, they felt a greater sense of satisfaction with their jobs. However, the researchers did note that a subset of the participants expressed a feeling of dissatisfaction with their jobs, which was attributed to a feeling of inability to fully perform the leadership role. Interestingly, principal support was a big factor in how satisfied these teacher leaders felt in their roles, particularly when the leadership role involved changing the instructional practice of colleagues (Berg et al., 2005). Although the authors explain how the leadership role is related to job satisfaction, they indicate that they cannot connect it to career decisions, as the research was conducted during a single school year.

A different study of second stage teacher leaders examined how their leadership role influenced their decision to stay in or leave teaching (Fiarman, 2007). As teacher leaders, the eight study participants from one county in Maryland who each had between four and ten years of experience as a classroom teacher worked as a leader outside of the school building for a



period of three years. During their time as a leader, the teachers were responsible for observing and meeting with underperforming teachers across the district and then presenting their findings to those in charge of the program. Upon completion of their three years of leadership, they returned to the school either as a classroom teacher or in a school-based leadership position for two years. Fiarman (2007) conducted individual interviews with a purposive sample of the program's teacher leaders, chosen to reflect the demographics of the group as a whole. She explains that after the full five-year commitment, "fewer than half of the participants in this sample chose to continue as classroom teachers" (p. 9).

While the leadership role provided participants with a satisfying experience in which they were able to develop new skills, they wanted to continue to use their newfound skills in their careers; being a classroom teacher simply did not allow them to do this (Fiarman, 2007). These teacher leaders shared that in addition to learning new skills, they enjoyed developing relationships with other teachers and having more control over their work than they did while in the classroom. Although they did not continue their careers as classroom teachers, they did continue their careers in the field of education. This supports scholars' notions that the current generation of teachers differs from their predecessors (Donaldson, 2005; Margolis, 2008); for some, classroom teaching is not a career from which to retire, it serves as a step in the direction of professional longevity in the field of education. Important to the discussion of this study is the fact that the teacher leaders did not complete their roles while in the classroom. After three years away from the job of classroom teacher, or even any other job, it may be difficult to return to a once-loved role. Further studies of teacher leaders should be conducted in which they continue their work as classroom teachers while also serving in a leadership capacity.

Another study of second stage teacher leaders focused on classroom teachers who took on an additional role as a leader. Margolis (2008) conducted an exploratory study of second stage teachers with four to six years of experience who served in a leadership role as mentors. Unlike participants in Fiarman's (2007) study, teachers in this study took on leadership roles while still working as a classroom teacher. The purpose of his study was to understand how the teachers' leadership role influenced their sense of satisfaction and purpose. Seven teachers were selected to participate in a professional development program that taught them how to mentor, and were subsequently paired with a student teacher. Interview and observation data were collected throughout the school year. Although previous research indicates that teachers with around 10 or 12 years of experience begin to question continued employment as a teacher (Huberman, 1989), Margolis (2008) believed that this phenomenon was happening with less experienced teachers. He found evidence for his idea; these second stage teachers with just four to six years of experience reported feeling less satisfied with the teaching career and felt that they faced extra work requirements and more stress. However, serving in a leadership role as a mentor helped them feel challenged, respected, and revitalized in their professional lives. Almost all of the teachers reported enjoyment and satisfaction through collaborating and developing a relationship with the student teacher in addition to developing new skills that may be useful as they move forward with their careers in education (Margolis, 2008). Of the seven teachers in this study, one did not feel satisfied through his role as a mentor; he was also of a different generation than the other participants, having become a teacher as a career switcher (Margolis, 2008).

It should be noted that each of the teachers in Margolis' (2008) study was recommended to serve as a mentor by someone in a position of power in the school district; the teachers

themselves did not seek out the opportunity to be a leader. The researcher was also thoroughly involved in the professional development sessions and discussion board posts that were part of the mentor program. While his in-depth involvement with the program may have helped him form a more trusting relationship with each of the participants, this may also have lent an element of bias to the study. Participants may not have been completely open and honest about their experiences and perceptions given the researcher's involvement with the program.

Although limited in scope, the literature on the topic of second stage teachers' leadership roles does provide important information. Serving as a teacher leader may influence a teacher's perception of job satisfaction, as well as their ultimate decision of whether or not to continue teaching. The second stage teachers included in these studies all shared that they gained something from their role as a teacher leader, and those gains then influenced other aspects of their work lives. The limited body of scholarly research on the topic of second stage teachers' leadership roles indicates that more work needs to be done in this area. Connecting their work as a classroom teacher, the role of teacher leader, and the satisfaction they feel through both will help researchers and practitioners alike develop meaningful and long-lasting career paths for second stage teachers.

## **Conclusion**

Taking on leadership roles may have positive outcomes for teachers, particularly those in the second stage of teaching who may desire a greater challenge in their work. Assuming these leadership roles has been associated with greater increased job satisfaction as well as a renewed interest in the teaching profession. While leadership roles may help increase teachers' feelings of job satisfaction, there is a line of research that may further explain how their jobs and additional leadership roles influence satisfaction and the decision to stay. This line of research is

focused on the antecedents of job satisfaction and explores the connection between satisfaction and fulfillment of employees' psychological needs. Developing an understanding of the relationship between fulfillment of psychological needs, job satisfaction, and ultimately career decisions is important for researchers and practitioners alike. Although some have noted that empirical work in this area is lacking (e.g., Evelein, Korthagen, & Brekelmans, 2008; Betoret, 2013), there is a growing body of literature investigating teachers' psychological needs.

### **Basic Psychological Needs**

Scholars have noted the importance of understanding factors that lead to teachers leaving the profession (e.g., Borman & Dowling, 2008) and that factors specific to teaching context along with an individual's perceptions combine, leading to an individual's career decision. Yet, it has been stated that research on teachers' career decisions does not often include psychological factors that may play a role in these decisions (Guarino, Santibanez, & Daley, 2006; Hong, 2012). Psychological factors may indeed act as antecedents for career intentions and decisions (Kumar, Dass, & Topaloglu, 2014), and including them in an examination of teacher retention and attrition may provide a better understanding of how a teacher's career decision is reached. Although all teachers, particularly those in urban environments, may face the same difficulties that are often associated with attrition, Hong (2012) explains, "Under the same working conditions, individual teachers react in different ways and make different decisions" (p. 419). Learning more about how teachers arrive at their career decisions by examining them through specific psychological lenses may help researchers understand how some teachers choose to stay in a profession from which so many leave. One psychological lens that may prove useful in understanding the phenomenon of teacher retention is the theory of basic psychological needs.

Self determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000) provides a framework for understanding why individuals choose to engage in various behaviors. This theory of motivation includes, at its core, psychological needs that must be satisfied for optimal functioning (Gagne & Deci, 2005). In this basic psychological needs theory (Brien, Hass, & Savoie, 2012), an individual's motivation depends on the fulfillment of three basic psychological needs, autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Bauer & Mulder, 2006). Ryan and Deci (2002) explain that because they are conceptualized as being universal to all people regardless of culture, there are only three needs included in the theory. Although universal in nature, the "mode and degree" (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 75) of satisfaction of the three basic psychological needs can vary across individuals and cultures. Fulfillment of the three basic psychological needs is necessary for people to experience well-being, which is defined as "life satisfaction and psychological health" (Ryan & Deci, 2001, p. 147). The researchers share that "thwarting these needs will result in negative psychological consequences in all social or cultural contexts" (Ryan & Deci, 2001, p. 147). While fulfillment of the basic psychological needs may be connected to life and job satisfaction, the two concepts are different. Job satisfaction is an emotional response describing how an individual feels about his or her work (Saari & Judge, 2004), whereas need fulfillment can direct an individual's work behavior regardless of how the person feels about the work itself (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Each of the three basic psychological needs plays a role in an individual's well-being, however fulfillment of the three needs is not the same as an individual's sense of job satisfaction, or overall positive feeling toward his or her work (Judge, Weiss, Kammeyer-Mueller, & Hulin, 2017). The need for autonomy is an individual's aspiration to have a certain amount of agency over decisions. This need is met when a person believes he or she has the opportunity to make

choices (Ryan & Deci, 2002). The need for autonomy has been misunderstood by some who believe it to be independent from outside influence; autonomy allows an individual to follow the directives of others as long as the individual still believes he or she has a choice (Van den Broeck, Ferris, Chang, & Rosen, 2016). Van den Broeck and colleagues (2016) offer an example to illustrate this notion. They explain that an employee who elects to work on a project through lunch at the request of the manager is still satisfying his or her need for autonomy because a choice was made. On the other hand, if an individual was forced to work through lunch, the need for autonomy would not be fulfilled (Van den Broeck et al., 2016).

In addition to autonomy, the theory of basic psychological needs includes two other needs, competence and relatedness (Bauer & Mulder, 2006). Competence is an individual's sense of effectiveness in a situation or action (Ryan & Deci, 2002). This need centers on the desire for environmental exploration (Van den Broeck, Ferris, Chang, & Rosen, 2016) and task performance (Bauer & Mulder, 2006). The need for relatedness centers on an individual's need to feel connected to others (Ryan & Deci, 2002). Satisfaction of this need is experienced when an individual feels a sense of belonging within a group (Van den Broeck et al., 2016).

Because of their importance to the well-being of individuals across all settings, much scholarly work has been devoted to the examination of these three basic psychological needs. Research has provided empirical evidence that autonomy, competence, and relatedness are indeed psychological needs experienced by people of all ages across diverse cultures (e.g., Ryan & Deci, 2002; Chen et al., 2015). The literature in the field includes numerous empirical studies on employee basic psychological needs and workplace well-being. Recent studies have begun to examine how basic psychological needs play a role specifically for those in the teaching profession (e.g., Aldrup, Klusmann, & Ludtke, 2017; Collie, Shapka, Perry, & Martin, 2016;

Hobson & Maxwell, 2017; Klassen, Perry, & Frenzel, 2012). Additionally, existing research on teachers' career decisions often supports the idea that fulfillment of the needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness may contribute to a teacher's ultimate career decision.

### **Research on Teachers' Basic Psychological Needs**

While there is not a vast amount of research examining teachers' basic psychological needs, this body of work is growing. Research in the field tends to take a quantitative approach, using instruments designed to measure needs of employees from various industries (Brien, Haas, & Savoie, 2012), instruments designed to specifically measure teachers' needs (Betoret, 2013), or even subscales created from a questionnaire designed for a different purpose (Marshik, Ashton, & Algina, 2017). Subscale reliabilities from the instruments differ greatly, and this makes it challenging to determine which instrument may be the best option when conducting research in this field. It should also be noted that much of the research on teachers' basic psychological needs comes from nations other than the United States, which may have very different cultural and academic environments. Regardless of the varied nature of the data collection instruments and potential lack of generalizability due to contextual differences, research from this field does provide important information regarding teachers' workplace well-being, which may be used as a springboard for future research in this area.

**Relatedness.** The need for relatedness has received a great deal of attention in the literature. This is understandable, as through their work, teachers make connections with students, administrators, and colleagues. In one study, relatedness was found to be of the utmost importance to teachers' well-being (Klassen, Perry, & Frenzel, 2012). Klassen and colleagues (2012) determined that relatedness strongly correlated with work engagement and emotional exhaustion; teachers who felt greater fulfillment of the need for relatedness with their students

reported higher levels of work engagement and lower levels of emotional exhaustion. Although relatedness with colleagues was examined in this study as well, researchers found that it is of much less importance than relatedness with students (Klassen et al., 2012). This mirrors the finding from research on teachers' career decisions that students are the primary reason teachers remain in the profession (Battle & Looney, 2014; Bennett, Brown, Kirby-Smith, & Severson, 2013; Brunetti, 2006; Perrachione, Petersen, & Rosser, 2008; Stanford, 2011). Another noteworthy finding from the literature is that the need for relatedness may change over time (Collie, Shapka, Perry, & Martin, 2016). Collie et al. (2016) found that relatedness with students was a more important need for well-being of younger rather than older teachers. In another study, this phenomenon was also noted and extended (Aldrup, Klusmann, & Ludtke, 2017). Aldrup and colleagues (2017) explained that less experienced teachers whose need for relatedness with students was not fulfilled experienced stronger feelings of emotional exhaustion than more experienced teachers with the same lack of need fulfillment. It may be that as teachers age and gain more experience in the profession, other needs (i.e., autonomy and competence) become more important, or perhaps relatedness with colleagues becomes a more essential need to their workplace well-being.

**Autonomy.** In their secondary data analysis of English teachers, Hobson and Maxwell (2017) found that participants made mention of autonomy less than relatedness or competence. They did offer suggestions as to why autonomy was not found to be a significant factor in teacher well-being. The researchers suggested that early career teachers have only worked under current educational policies and might not feel a lack of autonomy because they have no other experiences to which they can compare their current situation. This is similar to findings from Szczesiul's (2007) study on second stage teacher autonomy. She also found that autonomy was



not important to the teachers in her study. As with Hobson and Maxwell's (2017) participants, Szcsesiul's (2007) participants had only taught under current educational policies, which may influence how they view autonomy in teaching. However, for some teachers, fulfillment of the need for autonomy matters greatly. Collie, Shapka, Perry, and Martin (2016) examined teacher psychological needs with a specific focus on perceptions of autonomy support. Collie et al. (2016) found that perceptions of autonomy supportive administrators are associated with teachers' sense of fulfillment of autonomy, competence, and relatedness needs. Fulfillment of these basic psychological needs was associated with workplace well-being, which then acted as a mediator between psychological needs and job satisfaction (Collie et al., 2016). This indicates that without the fulfillment of basic psychological needs, teachers may not be able to experience job satisfaction.

**Competence.** Researchers have highlighted the importance of providing teachers with opportunities to engage in professional development, stating that this may meet their need for competence, as this help them develop skills making them more effective (Hobson & Maxwell, 2017). Similarly, Carson and Chase (2009) recommend that school leaders encourage teachers, particularly early career teachers, to become involved in professional activities, including attending and presenting during professional development sessions. Their recommendation is based on their finding that engaging in professional activities predicted psychological need satisfaction in a sample of physical education teachers in the United States (Carson & Chase, 2009). Others have also found that engaging in professional learning activities is associated with satisfaction of psychological needs (Jansen in de Wal, den Brok, Hooijer, Martens, & van den Beemt, 2014). However, one study did indicate that a conscious effort must be made by those leading the professional development to ensure that teachers' psychological needs are met

(Aelterman, Vansteenkiste, Van Kerr, & Haerens, 2016). Simply encouraging teachers to attend continuing professional development opportunities may not be enough to satisfy their needs.

Continuing professional development is something all teachers experience though, and Aelterman, Vansteenkiste, Van Kerr, and Haerens (2016) explain that often the pedagogical changes expected as a result of professional development are met with resistance from teachers. Indeed, physical education teachers who perceived their basic psychological needs of competence, relatedness, and autonomy to have been met through the professional development sessions had greater feelings that implementation of the pedagogical changes would be effective and stated their intentions to implement the new strategies. Although they did not specify the means through which teachers' needs were met, they encouraged other researchers to examine whether meeting teachers' basic psychological needs through continuing professional development leads to greater adoption of strategies with teachers of other subjects. Collecting qualitative data as part of a study such as this one could help researchers understand how teachers perceive their psychological needs to be satisfied through continuing professional development, which could then be used to inform practice. Perhaps the collegiality developed through the professional development session meets some teachers' need for relatedness. For others, perhaps the act of self-selecting the professional development session is enough, as it may meet their need for autonomy.

### **Basic Psychological Needs Related to Teacher Career Decisions**

Evaluating existing studies on teachers' career decisions also provides evidence of the importance of the three basic psychological needs in their sense of job satisfaction and decision to remain. While research on teachers' career decisions does not necessarily examine the topic through the lens of basic psychological needs, there is evidence in the literature that these needs

are present regardless of the focus of the study, indicating the usefulness of this theoretical lens for studying teachers' work lives.

In one example, Yanezawa, Jones, and Singer (2011) conducted an in-depth qualitative study to understand the experiences of six urban teachers as they participated in a national professional development program. The researchers found that teachers in this program described feeling a renewed sense of excitement for the teaching profession after having participated in this program. They shared that they increased their knowledge of writing, they gained a supportive network of colleagues, and they felt as though they had control and say over what they did (Yanezawa et al., 2011). Each of these findings seems to align with one of the basic psychological needs, competence, relatedness, and autonomy, respectively. Although the theory of basic psychological needs was not used as a framework for their study, the findings of Yanezawa and colleagues' study (2011) support the idea that fulfilling a teacher's needs can help them feel a greater sense of satisfaction and can ultimately lead to retention within the career.

A study of early career teachers in Australia also seems to reflect teachers' needs for relatedness, competence, and autonomy (Burke, Aubusson, Schuck, Buchanan, & Prescott, 2015). These beginning teachers desired collegial relationships, or relatedness, with their more experienced peers, whether they intended to remain in or leave the profession. Similarly, both groups, the stayers and the leavers, expressed an interest in professional development and resources that could help them develop their craft, particularly in the area of classroom management. This reflects the need for competence. However, participants in this study who intended to leave the profession wanted specific training that could be applied to their immediate teaching, while those intending to stay desired broader, more abstract training. Interestingly, the need for autonomy was vastly different for those intending to leave and those intending to

stay. Leavers wanted more autonomy and wanted a “professional voice” (Burke et al., 2015, p. 250) in administrative duties, whereas stayers expressed indifference to experiencing greater autonomy. Perhaps those intending to stay felt they had enough autonomy in their role as a teacher. The fulfillment of this psychological need through any professional means may have been enough for them.

Fulfillment of the three basic psychological needs is also found in a study examining second stage teachers in a leadership position. Fiarman (2007) studied second stage teachers who were placed in leadership roles outside of the classroom. These teachers took on the responsibility of traveling around the school district, observing in-service teachers, and offering feedback on their performance. Fiarman (2007) sought to understand how this role contributed to their career decisions. Individual interviews were conducted with a sample of second stage teacher leaders whose demographic characteristics reflected the overall population of teacher leaders in the program. Participants shared that their need for competence was fulfilled through the skills they developed as teacher leaders. The teachers embraced the challenge of learning new skills and appreciated that they were able to push themselves to become good at something outside of the classroom. Fiarman (2007) explained that participants described having experienced a lack of autonomy and independent decision making as classroom teachers. However, they had their need for autonomy fulfilled through their leadership role; they were able to determine their own schedule and conduct their work as a leader as they saw best. Although the needs for autonomy and competence were met, study participants indicated a lack of fulfillment of the need for relatedness. Fiarman (2007) found that while they enjoyed most aspects of their leadership role, they longed for a sense of community. Taking on the leadership role outside of the school and traveling from location to location affected their feelings of

relatedness. Although they routinely interacted with novice and veteran teachers, they lamented about the lack of collegiality and described feeling isolated from their peers.

Returning to the role of classroom teacher was something only about half of the teachers in Fiarman's (2007) study indicated they had done or were planning to do. Instead, they desired to continue to use their newly developed competencies in a different way, one in which they were also able to fulfill their need for relatedness through "meaningful opportunities to work with colleagues" (p. 10) and maintain a feeling of autonomy in the work they do. Although many did not intend to remain in the classroom, all participants indicated a desire to remain in the field of education. While it did not set out to specifically examine need fulfillment of second stage teachers, the study conducted by Fiarman (2007) is still quite relevant to this current study. The findings indicate the importance of basic psychological need fulfillment; the current study specifically inquired about need fulfillment as it attempted to understand how the work of second stage teacher leaders, both in and outside of the classroom, influences their career decisions.

## **Conclusion**

Fulfillment of the three basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness has been connected to both job satisfaction and the decision to remain in the teaching profession. Studies of teacher career decisions and leadership roles also have findings that align with the theory of basic psychological needs, even though they have not set out to examine teachers' need fulfillment. Given the existing research, it seems logical to use the theory of basic psychological needs as a basis for examining teachers' job satisfaction and ultimately, their career decisions. However, one aspect that is largely absent from basic psychological need research is the use of qualitative methods. Providing teachers with an opportunity to share their perceptions of need fulfillment and how this has influenced their job satisfaction and career

decisions through individual interviews can strengthen the case for using this model and can provide researchers and practitioners with a greater understanding of how teachers see these three needs as playing a role in their work lives.

### **Chapter Conclusion**

Although attrition is greater for those in the beginning stage of the career, teachers with more years of experience may still make the decision to leave the profession, particularly in urban schools. Leadership roles and the fulfillment of teachers' basic psychological needs may play a role in their decision to remain in the profession. While there are numerous studies examining the reasons teachers provide for leaving the profession, fewer scholarly works "focus on the positive reasons why teachers stay" (Chiong, Menzies, & Parameshwaran, 2017, p. 1084). Allowing teachers to share why they have chosen to stay in the profession and how their leadership roles and fulfillment of basic psychological needs have played a role in their decision will contribute to the growing body of scholarly research in the field. Taking a qualitative approach to study this topic can provide a more in-depth understanding of the factors that contribute to teacher retention. Additionally, understanding how these teachers made and continue to make the decision to remain in the teaching profession in an urban school district provides important information for those involved in teacher training and school staffing decisions.

### **Initial Conceptual Model**

The current study began with a conceptual model created through an examination of literature on teachers' career stages and decisions, job satisfaction, leadership roles, and the theory of basic psychological needs. Figure 1 depicts the relationship between the topics included in this study as originally conceptualized. The literature provides evidence of factors in

the urban teaching environment that may push teachers toward attrition. Similarly, a teacher's second career stage, between four and 20 years of experience, also may present components that pull teachers from teaching in the urban environment. At the outset, the working hypothesis of this study was that this particular group of second stage, urban teachers, those who serve as coaches with the urban teacher residency program, are satisfied in their jobs, which acts as a buffer against the factors pushing or pulling them toward attrition. Existing literature provided evidence that this job satisfaction is the result of a fulfillment of their basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Fulfillment of these needs, a sense of job satisfaction, and ultimately the decision to continue teaching in the urban environment may have occurred through their work as a classroom teacher or through their role as a teacher leader. This study allowed teachers to describe how they experience need fulfillment and job satisfaction through their career as a classroom teacher and their role as a teacher leader. The findings presented in chapter 4 and subsequent discussion in chapter 5 indicate that the original conceptual model may not adequately capture the experiences of this group of teachers. Therefore, a revised conceptual model is presented in the discussion.

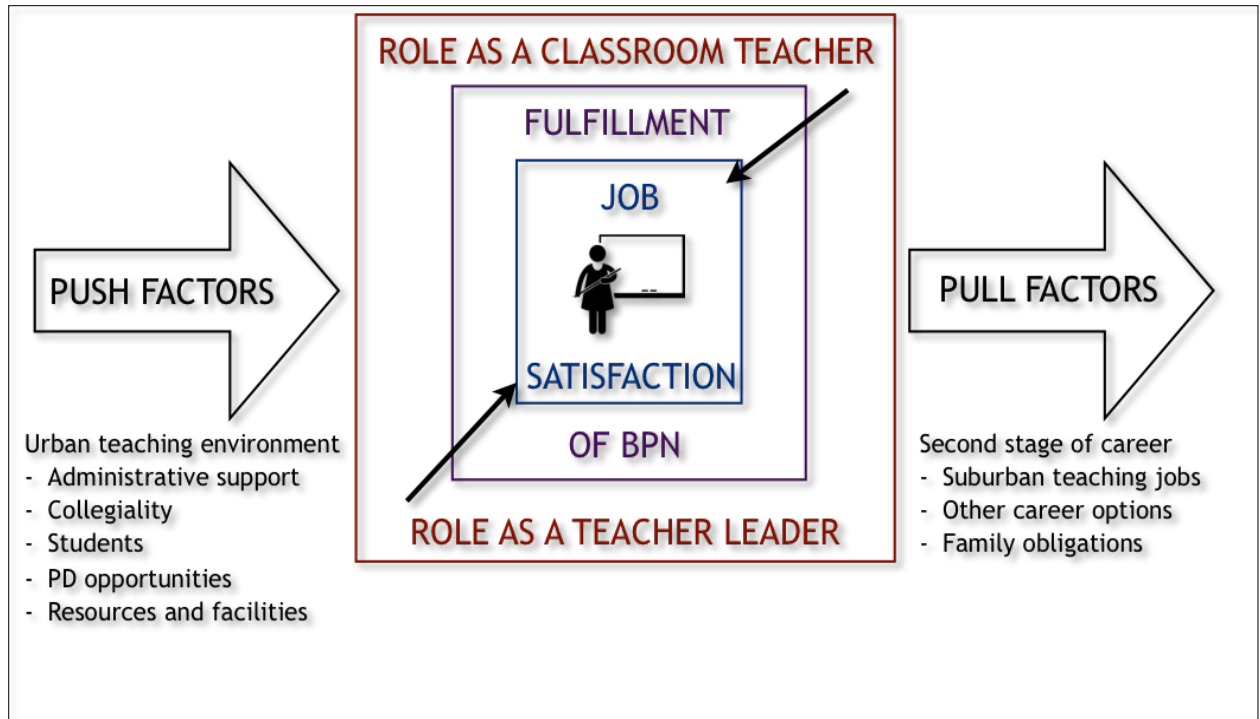


Figure 1. Conceptual model. This figure illustrates the working conceptual model for the current study.



### Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter provides a detailed description of the research methods this study used to explore the research questions. Using a multiple case, exploratory qualitative design, this study was guided by the overarching research question, *Why do second stage teacher leaders stay in an urban school district?* Specifically, this study sought to answer the following research questions:

- 1) How do these urban, second stage teacher leaders experience the fulfillment of the need for autonomy, competence, and relatedness
  - a) In their role as a classroom teacher?
  - b) In their role as a teacher leader?
- 2) How do these urban, second stage teacher leaders experience job satisfaction
  - a) In their role as a classroom teacher?
  - b) In their role as a teacher leader?
- 3) How do these urban, second stage teacher leaders describe their professional experiences as influencing their decision to remain in the profession?
  - a) Which factors from their work as a classroom teacher do they identify as being important to the decision to remain?

- b) Which factors from their leadership role do they identify as being important to the decision to remain?

The goal of this study was not to provide generalizable findings; rather, this study presents findings that explore why this particular group of second stage teacher leaders chooses to continue teaching in this specific urban school district. Although not generalizable, the findings of this study contribute to scholarly literature and provide information that can be applied to other research studies. This chapter continues by describing my researcher positionality, the design, including study context, participants, and data collection, as well as data analysis steps. It then concludes by discussing how I worked to ensure trustworthiness throughout the study.

### **Researcher Positionality**

Through this research study, as the qualitative researcher, I was the data collection instrument (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Because of this, there was a risk of me bringing in expectations and preconceived notions based on my prior experiences that could have influenced the study and its findings. While my experiences led me both to graduate school and to this line of research, they also had the potential to interfere with the trustworthiness of the study's findings. However, my own experiences as a teacher allowed me to have a greater understanding of the participants' experiences throughout the interviews. Maxwell (2013) calls for qualitative researchers to create memos in which they write about their identity and how this may affect the research; below is a description of how I came to conduct this study and how my experiences have shaped the way I approach this work.

When I was an undergraduate student at Virginia Tech, my roommate was majoring in elementary education. I would often help her create things for her classes and student teaching

and found it enjoyable to talk about ideas for lesson plans with her. During the time that she and I lived together, I spent a summer in Chicago working with children from a housing project. Although I had never worked with children prior to that summer, I found it to be one of the most meaningful experiences of my life. After graduating from college with bachelor's degrees in English and psychology, I worked at a few odd jobs in offices and restaurants, but struggled with feeling like any of the jobs was just right for me. I thought back to my experiences in Chicago and working with my roommate on her teaching coursework and realized that I too wanted to be a teacher. However, while my roommate entered the teaching career wanting to be in the classroom, I saw being a classroom teacher as a step toward a different career in the field of education.

I attended VCU, earned my master's degree in teaching, and had a job as a kindergarten teacher before I completed my student teaching. Two years in, I moved from a county school to a city school, where I taught for five more years. During this time, my college roommate quit teaching. Although this career had been her heart's desire, she was dissatisfied. Many of my co-workers also left, either for jobs in suburban schools or for a different career path altogether. The school in which I worked was challenging. Support was hard to find, student behaviors were often out of control, and the overall climate of the building was very negative. After seven years as a classroom teacher, I decided that I had had enough. While I knew that being a classroom teacher was not the best career fit for me, it saddened me to see fantastic teachers with many successful years in the classroom leave the profession that they loved.

After taking time away from the field of education, I realized that was still the career field in which I belonged, even if being a classroom teacher was not the right fit. I thought about the challenging nature of urban school districts and how great teachers leave the profession they

love because they just cannot tolerate the work environment. I decided that I could do something about it. I began the PhD program in educational psychology because I wanted to develop an understanding of the theories that underlie every facet of education. I knew that if I could begin to understand why certain things are, I could find a way to make them better.

Although I know the importance of scholarly research, I am a practitioner at heart. I approach every research project with the idea that what I do can make a real difference in the life of a teacher or student. This dissertation is no different. Although I, and several people I know, left teaching during the second stage of our careers, many others stay. I chose this topic for this study because I wanted to understand why that happens. Learning more about what compels these teachers to keep teaching in this challenging urban school district not only adds to the scholarly body of knowledge, but serves as a springboard for ideas to help more teachers stay in the profession they love.

### **Research Design**

Qualitative research design can take on many forms (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). This research used an exploratory multiple case study approach to investigate how individual second stage teacher leaders view their decision to remain teaching in the urban school district. According to Gerardo Blanco Ramirez, while the definition of a case study is somewhat ambiguous due to the variety of ways a case study may be used, the commonality among all case studies is that they provide “contextualized deep understanding” (Marshall & Rossman, 2016, p. 19). Given that this study sought to understand why second stage teacher leaders stay in an urban school district, case study was a logical choice for a research design. For this study, each teacher was treated as an individual case, as each brought his or her own unique set of experiences and perceptions. The multiple case study approach provided an in-depth

examination of each individual's work and leadership experiences and how these, job satisfaction, and need fulfillment contribute to their decisions to remain in the urban district. Individual cases were analyzed and compared to one another to develop a full picture of how this group of teachers reached the decision to stay and whether their experiences and perceptions differed from one another. Additionally, demographic information was collected on each participant prior to conducting the interview.

### **Study Context**

This study was conducted in a mid-sized mid-Atlantic urban school district which is referred to throughout as City Public Schools. This school district is comprised of 40 schools and serves approximately 25,000 students, with 65.6% of the students considered economically disadvantaged according to state data. Some of the schools in which participants teach are zoned schools; students living within the school zone attend the school. Some of these zoned schools serve children living in lower socioeconomic conditions, including housing projects, and some serve children living in more affluent neighborhoods. Some of the zoned schools also serve a growing population of non-English speakers. Other schools in the district are specialty schools. Students living in the City Public Schools district must apply and be accepted to attend. Some zoned schools within the district also contain specialty programs, such as international baccalaureate programs. These schools serve students who are zoned to attend based on their home address as well as students who live elsewhere in the city and attend the specialty program. City Public Schools participates in statewide testing initiatives, in which the students' scores are routinely less than that of others in the state. Other comparisons between district and state data show that the district has a percentage of inexperienced teachers that is more than twice that of the state, as well as a percentage of provisionally licensed teachers that is more than twice that of

the state. City Public Schools also continually experiences high rates of teacher attrition; the school system had to fill almost 100 vacant positions before the start of the 2018-19 school year due to teachers leaving the district.

Because of the challenges of retaining teachers, City Public Schools partnered with a university and a teacher professional development organization to create an alternative teacher training program to prepare teachers to teach in this specific urban district, which is referred to throughout as the Mid-Atlantic Urban Teacher Residency. Once accepted, individuals going through the program, referred to as residents, take university courses while completing a year-long residency in the classroom of an experienced teacher who serves as a coach and mentors them throughout the residency year.

This study specifically focused on the mentors, or coaches, within the program. In-service teachers from City Public Schools interested in becoming a teacher leader with this program must apply and be accepted to become a coach. Once accepted, the teacher leaders attended intensive professional development sessions that instructed them on how to effectively provide mentorship to the resident, including implementing a gradual release program in which the resident assumes full teaching responsibility over time, conducting reflective conferences, and collecting data on the resident's growth and development as a teacher. Once paired with a resident, the coach then had the resident in his or her classroom for an entire school year and was responsible for helping prepare the resident for a teaching career in City Public Schools. Some of the coaches opted to work with residents each year, while others returned to their regular teaching responsibilities after working with one resident.

## **Participant Selection**

Similar to Kirkpatrick and Johnson's (2014) exploratory qualitative study on teacher engagement, I made the decision in this study to "limit contextual variation" (p. 235) by selecting participants from one teacher leadership program, the mid-Atlantic Urban Teacher Residency. Each participant had been trained to be a coach with the residency program. However, variation within this group of participants was sought in terms of gender and subject or grade level. The original plan for this study was to follow Fiarman's (2007) study of teacher leaders by gathering demographic information of all of the program's coaches from directors of the program. From there, I planned to select participants for this study which reflected the overall demographics of the program's coaches. I reached out to directors of the teacher residency program for information about the teachers serving as coaches. Getting information from the program directors proved to be challenging, though, as they needed time to ensure that they could share names and contact information with me. After numerous email exchanges over the course of several weeks, I received a list of names and email addresses of all of the secondary general education coaches. The director of the elementary track reached out to the coaches directly to see if they would be willing to have their names and contact information shared with me. I received a list of names and email addresses of the elementary general education coaches who agreed to have their information shared.

The list of secondary coaches contained the names and email addresses of 47 people, including both current and former coaches. The list of elementary coaches contained the names and email addresses of nine people, all current coaches. An email invitation describing the purpose and format of the study was sent to each of the 56 people. Appendix A contains the email invitation that was sent. Of the 47 emails that were sent to the secondary coaches, eight

were undeliverable as the coaches no longer worked for City Public Schools. All nine of the emails sent to elementary coaches were delivered. The email requested that if an individual was interested in participating in the study, he or she should click on the included link to provide demographic and contact information in a survey on the university's Redcap site. Appendix B contains the survey questions. The initial recruitment email was sent to secondary coaches in January, two weeks after they had returned to school from their winter break. Data collection began the following week and continued over the course of three and a half months. During this time, a follow-up recruitment email was sent to secondary coaches to attempt to increase the number of participants. The initial recruitment email was sent to elementary coaches in February after I received a list of names. Data collection began immediately and continued over the course of two months. During this time, a follow-up recruitment email was sent to elementary coaches.

My original plan was to use purposive sampling (Yin, 2016) to maximize the variation within my focused population by selecting participants that allowed me to closely match the program's overall population demographics with my sample demographics. However due to the small number of willing participants, the slow rate of responses, and the fact that I did not receive demographic data on all of the coaches in the program, I decided to interview every individual who was willing to participate. Table 1 provides information about the number of individuals invited to participate in the study and the number of individuals who participated in an interview.



Table 1

*Invited and Actual Participants*

		Secondary	Elementary	Total
Invited	Males	12	1	13
	Females	27	8	35
	Total	39	9	48
Participated	Male	6	0	6
	Female	9	5	14
	Total	15	5	20

**Data Collection**

Data collection took place in face-to-face meetings through semi-structured interviews. As participants completed the online demographic survey, I reached out to them individually to schedule a time and place to meet. While 20 individuals did participate in interviews for the study, it should be noted that five of these participants were former coaches who were no longer classroom teachers. These individuals were included in the contact list provided by program directors, and each completed the demographic survey indicating an interest in participating. Because I made the decision to interview everyone who was interested in participating in this study, these former coaches were interviewed. Although they had very interesting career stories to share, I have not included their data in the findings nor discussion of this study. Each of these individuals still works in City Public Schools, however since they made the decision to leave the classroom for other positions, their narratives do not answer the study’s overarching question.

Of the 15 interviews included in the analysis of data, each interview took place at the participant's school at the time and date of their choosing. I followed the advice provided by Yin (2016) regarding setting the tone for the interview from the beginning. I had never met any of the study's participants prior to interviewing them. I wanted to ensure that they would feel comfortable enough with me to be open and honest about their experiences. I was thoughtful about how I would introduce myself to each person. I shared with each one my experiences as a teacher in City Public Schools and as a researcher with the Mid-Atlantic Urban Teacher Residency and how those experiences led me to this study. I explained that I am hopeful that this study will provide information that can be used to benefit teachers in City Public Schools and beyond. After sharing information about myself, I reviewed the research participant information sheet (Appendix C) and provided a paper copy for the participant's records. 13 of the participants were interviewed one-on-one, and two, Susan and Kelly, requested to be interviewed together. The interviews followed an interview protocol (Appendix D), however the nature of the semi-structured interview allowed for conversation and a more natural exchange between myself and the participants (Holstein & Gubrium, 1997), so each interview was unique. The protocol was designed to allow the participant to talk about specific time points in his or her teaching career. These time points include becoming a teacher, moving from the novice stage to the second stage, becoming a coach, and the decision to continue teaching. Each large question on the protocol contained probes that I referred to during the interviews to help capture as much in-depth information from each participant's narrative as possible. Participants were able to fully discuss and describe elements of their work and coaching that matter to them when making decisions about their career. Interviews ranged in length from 33 minutes to 63 minutes and were recorded on a digital recorder. The audio files were then uploaded to a digital file on the

university's computer server. Across all 15 interviews included in the data analysis, a total of 11 hours and 55 minutes of interview data was captured.

### **Data Analysis**

As previously stated, the data for this study came from semi-structured interviews with 15 second stage teachers in City Public Schools who serve as coaches in the Mid-Atlantic Urban Teacher Residency program. Data analysis for this study was multi-faceted. Immediately following each interview, I recorded my initial thoughts and impressions in an interview memo. This allowed me to not only capture my thoughts about what the participant had shared and how it related to what I was hearing from others, but also to capture thoughts I had about myself as an interviewer. Soon after conducting each interview, I began the process of personally transcribing each recording. This allowed me to become even more familiar with the data and to begin the process of analysis while I was still collecting data (Pope, Ziebland, & Mays, 2000). I was able to highlight specific probes that I felt were essential to understanding each individual's story as well as add a couple of probes to the protocol.

Once I transcribed the interviews, I then de-identified both the interview memo and the transcript, substituting researcher-selected pseudonyms for names of participants and schools, and eliminating names of other individuals or locations that were shared during the interview. I listened to each audio recording a second time while reading through the transcript to ensure that I accurately captured what was stated during the interview. As I was re-listening to the interview recordings, I created a table of potential themes from the data using the participants' words. During the next phase of data analysis, the coding process, I was able to revisit this document and determine if the potential themes still seemed to be present.

To code the interview transcripts, I created a data file in MAXQDA data analysis software, to which I uploaded each de-identified transcript. I used a combination of in-vivo and process coding (Saldana, 2013) as I reviewed the transcripts. Because I began with a conceptual framework in mind, I had an idea of certain codes at the beginning of the coding process. These codes, such as the three basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness and job satisfaction were codes that I used from the start. To capture factors described in the interviews that the teachers viewed as reasons to stay or reasons to leave, I used the codes stay factor and leave factor. Finally, I used codes to indicate individuals being discussed in the transcripts. These included colleagues, students, administration, coaches, residents, and residency program leadership. These codes were used both alone and as co-codes. For example, if the teacher described developing professional relationships with fellow coaches in the program, both the coach and relatedness codes were used.

As coding continued, I allowed the data to speak for itself and created new codes as I saw them emerge from the data. Some of the codes were applicable to almost all of the interview transcripts. For example, teaching preparation and future plans were discussed by nearly every participant. Other codes were created to capture individual participants' statements using their words. For example, one participant said, "you can't do everything because you'll wear yourself down," which turned into the code you can't do everything. Further analysis of the data led to this code being incorporated in the larger work-life balance code, which then became part of a code called professionalism. The final codebook is included in Appendix E.

As I continued with the process of analyzing the transcribed interviews, I looked for sub-questions and topics to explore in the data (Magnusson & Marecek, 2015). An example of this is the topic of professionalism that appeared numerous times. Professionalism included several

smaller topics discussed in the interviews, such as work-life balance, respect, and benefits. Finding sub-topics such as professionalism allowed me to focus my analysis on specific information within and across the interviews. I created analytic memos (Yin, 2016) to help with this process. In these memos, I recorded passages from the data that illustrated the themes as well as mini-discussions of what I was seeing. I added to these throughout the analysis process, which provided me with a record of my thoughts and helped prevent me from losing ideas. In addition to the analytic memos, I created case memos for each participant. Because this study was a multiple case study, I needed a way to record each person's individual story, which could then be compared with others' stories. These case memos furthered my thinking about the study's findings (Maxwell, 2013).

### **Trustworthiness**

Qualitative inquiry relies on the researcher to be the instrument (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Because I was the instrument in this qualitative study, I ran the risk of interpreting the data based on my own work experiences and my expectations for this study. In an effort to ensure that the findings accurately reflected the data rather than my own personal bias, I took steps to improve the trustworthiness of the study's findings. To do this, I used member checking, memoing, discrepant data analysis, discussions of data interpretation, and in-depth participant responses.

### **Member Checking**

Member checking is a process through which interview participants are provided with transcripts of their interview to verify the data (Yin, 2016). I emailed each participant and explained that I had de-identified the data in the interview transcript and had given him or her a pseudonym. Attached to the email was the de-identified interview transcript that I asked each

person to review to ensure that it accurately captured what they had shared. I asked them to respond to the email with any questions, concerns, or any requests to change the information presented. Of the 15 participants whose transcripts were analyzed, I received responses from three. Two said that everything looked good in the transcripts, and one requested that a specific passage in the transcript not be shared. In addition to requesting feedback on the transcripts from the participants, I also offered a focus group session to discuss the initial findings of the study. I sent an email to the participants inviting them to attend the focus group to participate in a discussion of the findings. However, none of the participants came to the focus group. I then emailed each person a document discussing the initial findings and explained that they could share any thoughts or questions they had about the findings with me. I received a response from one out of 15 participants thanking me for the information.

## **Memoing**

Maxwell (2013) explains that the first step in qualitative data analysis is reading through the interview transcripts and writing “memos on what you see or hear in your data” (p. 105). As I have previously discussed, I used memoing as a way to capture my ideas about the data. Creating memos throughout the process allowed me to make tentative claims about the data that I then used as I moved through each of the transcripts. Because I included passages from the interviews in the memos, I was able to more easily identify when I was making claims that were not present in the data and were instead based on my expectations of what would be present. Creating the case memos for each participant also helped me stay as true to each participant as possible. I created a narrative detailing each person’s teaching and coaching experiences using the words they spoke during the interview.

## **Discrepant Data Analysis**

Because this study was designed to qualitatively explore the topic of teacher retention and determine whether the conceptual model was reflected in the data, it was important that I remained open to data that did not confirm the model. Examining the interview transcripts for discrepant data (Maxwell, 2013) allowed me to put forth findings that can be trusted. Instead of making large claims that are not true for all participants, presenting the discrepant data paints a more honest picture of teachers' reasons for staying in the teaching profession.

## **Discussions of Data Interpretation**

As the single researcher on this project, I ran the risk of interpreting the data incorrectly. I developed the code book, applied the codes to the interview data, and made claims about the data independently. Because I wanted to ensure that my findings are as trustworthy as possible, I sought input from a colleague who was familiar with not only the topics included in the study, but also the participants themselves. I had several conversations with her throughout the data analysis process during which I shared the data, my interpretations, and how I was thinking about my conceptual model. Instead of taking the approach of each coding segments of data and attempting to reach agreement, I took a more holistic approach. I invited her to read through interview data and share her interpretation of what she read, followed by a discussion of differences and similarities between our interpretations. Her input both challenged and confirmed my data interpretation.

## **In-depth Participant Responses**

One of the benefits of qualitative research is that it allows the participants to provide their own understanding of the topics being examined. Using the words of the participants to illustrate a study's findings lends an element of trustworthiness to a study. Instead of simply believing

that the researcher did indeed interpret the participants' words correctly, including their words allows the reader to verify for him or herself that the researcher's interpretation is valid. I have included rich, in-depth participant responses in the study's findings. This allows readers to verify that the conclusions I reached are logical given the data with which I was working. As the scholarly goal of this study is not to generalize to all second stage teacher leaders, but instead to provide a basis of understanding for those interested in the topics examined, providing these in-depth participant responses allows practitioners and scholars to determine what, if any, of this study's findings may be appropriate for the individuals with whom they work.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter has provided information which details how I carried out this study examining why second stage teacher leaders remain in the urban school district. This study gathered the perceptions and experiences of 15 second stage teachers in City Public Schools who also serve as mentors through the Mid-Atlantic Urban Teacher Residency program. Using the previously described methods, I endeavored to conduct a meaningful and trustworthy study. My goal was that this exploratory multiple case study would add to the knowledge base of scholars and practitioners alike as they make strides to improve teacher retention.



## Chapter 4: Findings

In this chapter, I present the findings from this multiple case exploratory qualitative study that sought to understand the career experiences and decisions of second stage teachers in City Public Schools who also serve as mentors to pre-service teachers in the Mid-Atlantic Urban Teacher Residency program. As previously stated, the guiding question for this research study is *Why do second stage teacher leaders stay in an urban school district?* The first sections of this chapter introduce each of the 15 participants in this study, beginning with the five elementary teachers, and then moving on to the ten secondary teachers. Each section, elementary and secondary case descriptions, begins with a table of participant demographics (Tables 2 and 3). The names of the participants and schools are pseudonyms, which were randomly chosen by the researcher. The information presented in these two tables was collected through the online demographic survey participants completed prior to being interviewed. Following each of the tables are the case descriptions for each participant included in the demographic table. The descriptions provide data from the interviews which will allow readers to get to know the individual participants the way I was able to through conducting the interviews. After the case descriptions, I present the findings for each of the study's research questions. Findings for research questions 1 and 2 are presented as themes that emerged from the data. Findings for research question 3 begin with vignettes for each of the study's participants. These vignettes

present larger data passages from the interviews which highlight how the individuals' experiences influence their career decisions. I chose to present a vignette for each participant because in this multiple case study, each individual's experiences and subsequent career decisions are unique. This provides a way for the reader to once again get to know the participants. After the vignettes, I present themes that emerged from the data.

### Elementary Case Descriptions

Table 2

#### *Elementary Participant Demographics*

Name	Gender	Race	School	Years of Teaching Experience	Years at Current School	Number of Residents Coached
Catherine	Female	White	Cherry Blossom Elementary	5	5	2
Elisha	Female	White	Magnolia Elementary	7	7	2
Gina	Female	White / Hispanic	Silverleaf Elementary	15	12	2
Kelly	Female	White	Silverleaf Elementary	6	6	1
Susan	Female	White	Silverleaf Elementary	12	12	3

## **Catherine**

Catherine shared that her path to teaching in City Public Schools was fairly straightforward:

I've always been interested in working with children. So, I started in college as a child psych major then realized the science was a little over my head. And realized you didn't really get to be with kids on a day to day basis like I wanted to. I'd always seen myself having more of an impact day to day. So I switched to elementary ed in college. Always knew that I wanted to do inner city, poverty type of communities.

Catherine is from the City metro area and attended private school when she was young. While in college, she "worked as an assistant kindergarten teacher" at a private school and explained, "I grew up in that community and knew a lot of people, so that was a good jumping off point for me while I was finishing school." After graduation, she attended a City Public Schools job fair where she was hired by her principal to begin work at Cherry Blossom Elementary and has been teaching there for five years. Catherine learned about the teacher residency program through a friend who was a coach at the time:

She thought that I would be a good coach. So, when the elementary program director sends out those if you know somebody who's interested or you think would be a good coach, send them my way type of applications, I filled one out. They came and met me. I got matched.

Since becoming a coach, Catherine has worked with two residents.

## **Elisha**

After graduating from college with a degree in a non-teaching field, Elisha began working. She explained that her hours were not desirable, so she contemplated changing careers.

She explained, “I liked working with kids,” and in her line of work, she developed a love for “the learning and the practicing,” both of which influenced her decision to become a teacher. Elisha made the decision to go back to school and get her master’s degree in teaching and went through a traditional teacher preparation program. She decided to do her student teaching in City Public Schools because of the proximity of the school system to her house. Her student teaching placement was at a school that was not “representative of the district.” After graduation, she began working at Magnolia Elementary, where she has been a teacher for the past seven years. Elisha has two young children, and while she enjoys her time with them, she feels she is best suited for working outside of the home. She explained, “I’m not a stay-at-home mom by nature. I just don’t think I could be a good mom for my kids that way.” She shared that she learned about the residency program through a former professor. “An old professor had approached me and said that you should do this.” She has since worked with two residents.

### **Gina**

Gina teaches at Silverleaf Elementary School and has been teaching for a total of 15 years, all of which have been in City Public Schools. Her first three years were at a different elementary school, and she has been at her current school for 12 years. She did not originally intend to become a teacher, instead she went to college with a different career and major in mind. When that original plan did not work out, she “had a lot of support and people telling me you should really try to teach.” She completed a traditional teacher preparation program in a non-urban area, and relocated to City for her spouse’s career. Gina signed up to be a substitute teacher in City Public Schools and was given an unexpected job in the middle of the school year. “It was a very quick sort of shock, ok I’m going in to substitute, but I’m actually working a real teaching job here.” Gina learned about the residency program through an email she received in

which she was asked to be a coach. She debated agreeing to do it, and shared that she had to ask herself “will I be able to live with another person sharing my space for a year, and as an introvert? That’s really big because I like having my space and my quiet time to do things.” She decided to become a coach and has worked with two residents.

### **Kelly**

Kelly is a teacher at Silverleaf Elementary School, where she has been working for six years. She has always wanted to be a teacher and attributes this desire to challenges she faced when she was in elementary school. She shared, “My second grade teacher inspired me to be a teacher. I was a struggling reader, had a really hard time my whole elementary, middle school career. And so I didn’t want children to suffer like I did.” She went through a traditional teacher preparation program and began her teaching career at her current school. Kelly grew up in the City metro area and did not originally intend to return to the area after graduating from college. She tried to get a teaching job in another state, but was unsuccessful. Kelly explained that she had given her resume to City Public Schools at a job fair even though she had no true interest in teaching there. Right before the school year began six years ago, she received a call from City Public Schools asking if she was still interested in a job. She has been working at Silverleaf Elementary since then. She learned about the residency program from her colleague, Susan. Kelly has had one resident.

### **Susan**

Susan is a teacher at Silverleaf Elementary School, where she has been teaching for 12 years. She said, “I just always wanted to be a teacher” and detailed jobs she held prior to becoming a teacher that all involved working with children. She went through a traditional teacher preparation program and began her teaching career at her current school. After she

graduated from her teacher preparation program, Susan applied to teach in two cities with the plan of accepting the job in the city that offered it first. She had an option of several elementary schools but chose Silverleaf because it allowed her to teach the grade level she wanted and because she felt a connection with the school’s principal when she interviewed with her. She shared, “I just vibed really well with the principal. I got a really good feeling from her. I had a really good conversation with her. I felt very comfortable with her.” When asked how she became a coach with the residency program, she responded:

I learned about it from, so a lot of teachers around here had student teachers. And after my, I don’t know eighth year or something like that, I was like I want a student teacher. Why can’t I do that? I want to do that.

After looking into how to be a cooperating teacher, she learned about the residency program. She has since worked with three residents.

### Secondary Case Descriptions

Table 3

*Secondary Participant Demographics*

Name	Gender	Race	School	Years of Teaching Experience	Years at Current School	Number of Residents Coached
Danielle	Female	African American	Evergreen Middle	5	5	2
Diana	Female	African American	Walden Middle	11	4	1

Jake	Male	Jewish	Barry Middle	6	1	2
Joseph	Male	White	Barry Middle	5	3	1
Julia	Female	White	Vista High	8	8	3
Liam	Male	White	Gable High	6	6	1
Mark	Male	White	Anderson High	9	9	5
Ned	Male	White	Anderson High	7	7	1
Robin	Female	Black	Skyline High	15	10	1
Thomas	Male	White	Barry Middle	6	6	1

## Danielle

Having grown up in the City metro area, Danielle moved back home after graduating from college. She explained, “When I graduated from college, I was trying to figure out what I wanted to do.” She began working at a middle school in a neighboring county in a non-teaching role. Danielle said it was during this time that she thought about becoming a teacher. She shared that as she explained things to the students, “I was like I could do this. I would like doing this.” Danielle’s parents both worked in City Public Schools, and she decided to pursue teaching in the school system as well, hoping that she could make a difference in the lives of the students. She

went through an alternative teacher preparation program and was able to spend a great deal of time in Evergreen Middle School prior to taking a job there, where she has been teaching for four years. She decided to become a coach with the residency program because “it’s just beneficial to City. If I get somebody in who I can help push them through, then that’s one less teacher that comes in that doesn’t know what’s going on.” She has coached two residents.

### **Diana**

Diana works at Walden Middle School, which is the fourth school she has worked for in City Public Schools. Having taught for 11 years in City Public Schools, she has been at her current school for four years. She did not originally intend to be a teacher, and chose a different college major. She explained that her entry into teaching happened after she graduated. “I used to hang around with a whole bunch of teachers, and I said hmm, maybe I can do that because I’ve always been good with kids. I decided to pursue teaching.” She began working at a middle school in City Public Schools with a provisional license. During her time at that school, she received her teaching license. Diana learned about the residency program when she was working at her third school. She has worked with one resident.

### **Jake**

Prior to becoming a teacher, Jake worked in several different jobs, including a science education position. This is what led him to his decision to become a teacher. He shared, “I thought I would like classroom teaching because I had worked with all these classroom teachers.” He explained his decision to pursue a teaching career in City Public Schools. “I had been living in the city, and I’m enough of a liberal that I would want to teach in City Public Schools since I lived here.” Jake went through an alternative teacher preparation program and became a teacher at a middle school in City Public Schools that he had been able to spend a great



deal of time in during his teacher preparation program. He worked at that school for five years before moving to his current position at Barry Middle School this year. Jake knew the residency program directors and was asked by them to become a coach. He stated, “I didn’t not want to be a coach, but I didn’t really consider it.” He explained that he decided to try coaching because “I’m always interested in learning new skills. So I’ll say yes to things without thinking too hard about it.” He has worked with two residents.

### **Joseph**

After spending some time in a different career, Joseph decided to become a teacher. He explained, “I wanted to teach in the city. I didn’t want to be a teacher, I wanted to be a teacher in the city.” He attended a traditional teacher preparation program and completed his student teaching in City Public Schools. After graduating, Joseph began his teaching career at an elementary school in City Public Schools but was not certified for what he was teaching; however, he explained that the human resources department for City Public Schools did not find a placement for him in his actual area of certification until a colleague who had established relationships with human resources personnel spoke on his behalf. He has been teaching at Barry Middle School since then. Joseph explained learning about the residency program through Mark, another participant in this study. He shared that Mark essentially guilted him in to becoming a coach. “He said you’re in this game because you care, right? If you care so much and you want to better these kids’ lives, what if you taught someone to teach like you?” Joseph decided to become a coach and has worked with one resident.

## **Julia**

Julia grew up in a community near City Public Schools. As a teenager, she began volunteering as a tutor for elementary students in City Public Schools, which led her to pursue a career as a teacher:

I just realized it was something I loved and I felt like I was good at it. I think at that point in my life I was just trying to figure out what do I really want to do, what's my purpose. And I come from a family of teachers too, so I thought that's what I wanted to do, and went to school for education.

She decided to complete her student teaching at two different schools in City Public Schools because "I knew I wanted to teach in the city. That was really my goal, I wanted to be a good teacher in the city." After graduating from her teacher preparation program, she began teaching at Vista High School and has been there for eight years. When she first learned about the residency program, Julia's response was "oh cool, a teacher who can help me, great!" She became a coach and has worked with three residents.

## **Liam**

Liam has been teaching in City Public Schools for six years, all of which have been at Gable High School. He explained that he does not know how he decided to become a teacher:

I can tell a pretty clean narrative about my teaching life and I think my development as a teacher starting at the point where I had made the decision ok I'm going to be a teacher, but that moment or whatever, the timespan between when I wasn't thinking about teaching and when I decided ok, I'm going to be a teacher, it's really unclear.

Although he might not remember the specifics of his decision to become a teacher, he made the choice while he was in college and ended up completing a traditional teacher preparation

program. During his teacher preparation program, he did a practicum in City Public Schools. He shared that he is not sure if this was influential on his decision to teach in the city:

I can't remember if before I did my practicum I said I want to teach in City Public Schools, or if I did my practicum in City Public Schools and then was simultaneously learning about public education and how there's an unequal distribution of educational resources, and that if I could make some kind of effort to equalize that, I should.

Regardless of his pre-service narrative, Liam has been at Gable High School for the duration of his teaching career. He knew about the Mid-Atlantic Urban Teacher Residency program through his colleagues and was nominated to be a coach by one of his colleagues. He explained, "I was glad to do it. I was excited to do it." He has worked with one resident since becoming a coach.

## **Mark**

While in college, Mark considered pursuing a career in academia. He explained changing his mind and deciding instead to become a public school teacher. "I decided since I liked working with undergraduates that I would try teaching, also thinking that it would just be more conducive to family life." He attended a traditional teacher preparation program and took a job at Anderson High School in City Public Schools after graduating. He has been teaching there for nine years. Mark shared how he came to be a coach with the residency program:

My content specialist, I think, must have recommended me because I just got an email one day saying I'd been nominated, and if I would be interested, here was the application process. I was familiar with the residency program because by that point, we'd had a couple of teachers who had graduated from the program join our staff.

He has coached five residents. In addition to his role as a coach, Mark holds several leadership positions in his school.

## **Ned**

Ned moved to City from a different state in which he had been working toward a graduate degree. While he was in school, he volunteered as a tutor and realized that he greatly preferred this to his graduate work. When his family was moving to the area, he realized this was the time for him to make a change. "I said ok, it's time for me to get into teaching. I had so much enjoyed that tutoring that I was like time for a change." He attended an alternative teacher preparation program and was able to spend a great deal of time at a different high school in City Public Schools prior to completing his pre-service program. After graduation, Ned started teaching at Anderson High School, where he has been for seven years. He explained that he became a coach because of his colleague Mark:

Mark had been a coach for three years, and I've been watching him do that. And he'd keep saying hey, it's pretty good, you might want to try it...And so he finally convinced me that it was a good thing to try, and I thought ok.

He has coached one resident.

## **Robin**

Robin did not originally intend to become a teacher, but was instead working in the healthcare field:

I did not decide to become a teacher... One of my friends said to me I don't understand why you have a college degree and you're working this job overtime. She was like I sent you a forward for an interview that's in the school system.

She became a long-term substitute teacher with City Public Schools and was then hired as a teacher under a provisional license. After struggling to pass the required tests, she finally was able to do so and received her teaching license. Robin has been teaching in City Public Schools

for 15 years, the last 10 of which have been at Skyline High School. Similar to her explanation that she did not decide to become a teacher, when asked how she decided to become a coach, Robin responded, “I don’t think I did that either.” Her content specialist made the suggestion that she pursue the opportunity. Robin has coached one resident.

### **Thomas**

Thomas has been teaching for six years, all of which have been at Barry Middle School. He completed a traditional teacher preparation program through which he did his student teaching in a neighboring county. Prior to becoming a teacher, Thomas worked in two other middle schools in City Public Schools and also for a local organization for at-risk youth. He shared that he had his teaching license for several years prior to getting his job and that he chose to take a job at Barry Middle School because “I was just curious to test my skills in the classroom. The job was available, and the location seemed good.” Thomas shared how the opportunity to become a coach was presented to him:

I didn’t go seeking it. Some people said we put your name forward, and we want you to do this. And I was just like oh, well why? And they were like well because we think you’d be a good fit for it. I said well then I will think about it. I thought about it and said I think it’d be good to see if what I’ve learned is transferrable in any positive way to somebody who’s coming in and needs to learn the system.

Since becoming a coach, Thomas has worked with one resident.

### **RQ 1 - Experiences of Fulfillment of Basic Psychological Needs**

The first research question explored how second stage mentor teachers experience the fulfillment of the needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness in both the job of classroom teacher and additional role of coach with the residency program. Competence, or participants’

sense of effectiveness (Ryan & Deci, 2002), was the basic psychological need most often discussed in the interview data from the 15 participants. Relatedness, or feelings of connectedness with others (Ryan & Deci, 2002) was also often discussed. The third of the basic psychological needs, autonomy, or the participants' agency over their decisions (Ryan & Deci, 2002), appeared in the data less often than the other needs. The following sections share the findings regarding the first research question. The findings of this research question begin with participants' experiences of each of the three basic psychological needs in their work as teachers. After that, experiences of need fulfillment in the coaching role are presented.

### **Competence in Teaching**

Competence was the most discussed basic psychological need across all of the interviews. Elementary and secondary participants alike described shifts in their careers from not feeling a sense of competence in their novice stage to feeling a sense of competence in their second stage. Although this increase in competence was the primary pattern in the data, there were exceptions to this, as two of the teachers began their teaching career feeling a sense of competence.

**Early career lack of competence.** In almost all cases, teachers shared feeling of lack of competence in the novice stage of their career. This lack of competence was based primarily on teachers feeling unprepared to handle the various components of the teaching job, from classroom management to planning to data collection. When Thomas, who had completed a traditional teacher preparation program, was asked if he felt prepared to teach in the urban environment when he began his career, he shared:

Yes and no because I had worked with the kids in the urban environment for a couple years before that...I knew the kids. So that I think made it easier. And then there were

certain things I didn't feel prepared for as a teacher that I didn't discover I didn't feel prepared for until I was working as a teacher and was oh, I need to be doing this and this, but I hadn't been trained to do this and this when I was in the program...Data management was a major one...None of that stuff had been addressed in any of our programs.

Similar to Thomas, Julia had experience working with the students from the City Public Schools community prior to becoming a teacher, however, she still did not have a sense of competence when she began teaching. When asked what her first year was like, Julia responded:

Hard. I would come to school, actually I wouldn't get to school that early, but I would stay until probably 7 o'clock most days...It was exhausting. It was really challenging. I don't think we really think about what a mental challenge your first year of teaching is. And also though I had been working with this community, it was still just what it meant to be the teacher of record and responsible for all these kids, and also not feeling like you were truly supported. I wasn't given anything. I created all my own curriculum.

Ned too struggled with handling his workload when he began teaching. He shared in his interview that his first year was challenging, and when asked what was challenging about it, he shared:

It was pretty awful...Long story short, I was living by myself, and thank goodness because it was a lot of all-nighters...I really struggled. I had, depending on how you count, at least four preps. I had taught one of the courses previously during my pre-service program, but my cooperating teacher wasn't real big on lesson plans, wasn't real big on paperwork, wasn't real big on keeping her resources organized...So I was

inventing everything, which is what took me so many hours into the night every night.

So inventing all the curriculum for every prep was the hardest part of my job.

Elisha also explained how her pre-service preparation left her feeling a lack of competence when she began in her teaching position:

Just the classroom management piece was something that was really glossed over in college. And just the practical experience of working with students at a Title I school...I came from a place where there was very loose structure, and just thinking that I could transfer those skills over here was, I couldn't. Just, I mean the students that I work with here, they really rely on that structure, and that routine, and knowing what's coming next...I was really overwhelmed by the students' needs, and I think that I approached it in a way that was not helpful. Like oh, look at these poor children, when really, they had some skills that the students on the other side of town seriously lacked.

Catherine also explained that she felt unprepared to meet the needs of the students when she began teaching elementary school. She had attended private school as a student, and her pre-service teaching experiences were also in private schools. She explained, "I started in the nitty gritty of the tough city stuff, and it was a lot. It was a lot emotionally...I wasn't built for the rough and tough that these kids need." Mark also shared that like others, he came into the career not knowing how challenging he would find the work:

I figured it was going to be rough, but I, in hindsight, I think I came in with a certain degree of arrogance, figuring that just my expertise in my content area and my enthusiasm were going to make the difference. And I also just kind of figured I was used to working really hard, so I figured, again, in hindsight, with a certain degree of arrogance, I didn't think it was going to be that hard. And my first year was very



hard...It took me a long time to develop effective classroom management strategies. I wasn't connecting with the kids, and the lessons and activities that I was planning were probably more appropriate for a higher level.

Similarly, Gina explained that she began her teaching career feeling ready for the teaching component of the job. She had gone through a traditional teacher preparation program, and she felt that had provided her with the skills and knowledge she needed to be effective in her job. However, when she began teaching in her urban school she realized she was lacking competence in some areas of her job:

I had children touching my hair and my nose, where I felt like I was the first white person they had ever seen. So that right there was already kind of culture shock for me. In terms of content and planning, I felt that I was prepared. I did not feel that I was prepared for the classroom management piece because it was so different.

Kelly also shared that she came into the profession feeling ready for the job. However, she too experienced a lack of competence early in her career. She stated, "It's not so much that you don't feel prepared. You understand what you're doing, but you're getting thrown into a whole new world...I felt like I was drowning for the whole year. And then after that, it gets easier." Participants' experiences of a lack of competence early in their careers encompassed multiple facets of the teaching job. Whether a lack of competence in preparing content or developing relationships with students, a common thread in the data was that their pre-service programs did not fully prepare them to be teachers of record in the urban classroom. However, there were exceptions to this trend.

**Exceptions to early career lack of competence.** While a predominate theme in the data was a lack of competence early in the career, two of the participants had a different experience.

Jake and Danielle both shared that they felt prepared from the beginning of their career. Jake and Danielle were also the only two participants that experienced being in their initial work placement for an extended period of time during their pre-service preparation; every other participant began their teaching career being brand new to their work environment, whether they had come in with a provisional license or had come in with traditional student teaching experience. Jake explained that he began his teaching career in the exact classroom in which he had completed his pre-service training, and this, along with who he is as a person, led him to feeling a sense of competence from the beginning:

I felt pretty prepared because I was teaching the same classes I had taught in my pre-service program, in the same classroom. I'm also just one of these people who feels prepared even when I'm not prepared, I would say. I didn't have any stage fright. I was also in my mid-thirties. I'm tall, and I have a deep voice, and I'm a male. And, yeah, I knew the content really well...I knew how to stand in front of a group and command a presence anyway. What I didn't know was that a middle schooler really has about a ten-minute attention span before you have to move on to something else.

While Danielle did not begin her teaching career in the same exact classroom in which she had completed her pre-service training, she also shared how the experience of learning to teach in the school in which she then became a teacher helped her feel a sense of competence as she began her career:

They didn't even look at me as a first year teacher my first year here...I already knew the culture. I already knew some of the teachers. I knew how to read the pacing chart...I used to think they were like here's all the materials, teach. But it's like, here's one sheet of paper that tells you everything that you need to teach, make it happen, good luck.

You're kind of on your own. So I knew how to find my materials, make my materials. I had a really firm grasp on that. Even though my first year wasn't a breeze, it was way easier, and I was helping other teachers my first year of record.

**Fulfillment of the need for competence.** Several participants described experiencing a growing sense of competence after their first year of teaching and into the second stage. Danielle shared, "My second year, I was like oh, I've got this, it's in the bag because I'd taught the same thing twice." Similarly, Catherine explained, "Second year, I started the year feeling more confident with the curriculum. Still terrified of the diversity, the poverty, the emotions, the anger, and behavior problems that come with all of that sad stuff." Catherine went on to explain that she made the decision to "figure it out and make it my goal to be good at it" to ensure that she could fulfill her need for competence. Julia too explained, "I did feel a little better going into my second year just as far as really what to think about behavior management, how to truly engage students." Mark also described his increasing sense of competence, explaining that it was not an overnight shift. He shared:

The second year, comparatively, was a breeze. I still had challenges, but they didn't weigh on me like they had the first year. And then by the third year, even though I was teaching all new subjects, I was on pretty firm footing with what I was doing.

Ned explained that around his fourth year, he began to feel like he was able to do his job effectively. He shared that much of this had to do with the course preparation requirements and having to create new material each year:

Year four was a little bit better, but five was better. That was when it was noticeably easier to be a teacher. And the big problem with it was every year was different...Every year you have to create a whole new curriculum for a group of kids...And the last two

years, it's been the same preps, and that makes it hugely easier. When you have to invent something from scratch, it takes a lot of hours...I was teaching four or five preps for most of the four or five years. A couple of times in the last couple of years, I had three preps only. And this year, I have only two preps. I mean like wow! That's a totally different thing than having to do five things that you've never done before.

Some of the teachers in the study also explained how although they feel a greater sense of competence during their second stage of teaching than they felt during their novice stage, they still seek a greater fulfillment of this need and continue to look for ways to become more effective. For example, Joseph shared that one of the areas in which he wants to grow as a teacher is "making lessons interesting and diverse. Always. I'm going to do that the rest of my life. Every year my lessons get better. Every year they're not good enough. That'll be forever." He then went on to explain:

It's hard to get better year after year, because after year three, you can coast. But you're going to get bored, and you're going to leave. You've got to be hardworking every year. I'm competitive about it...I want every teacher in this building to think I'm the best teacher here. And there's still a couple teachers here that I think are better than me, and I want to be better than them.

Liam also shared how he felt a greater fulfillment of his need for competence during his second stage, yet he too sees how he can continue to become more effective in his teaching:

I have a strong sense of what I think teaching should look like. And therefore, it's easier for me to seek out resources that I trust. And I'm not floundering about and wondering what kind of teaching I should be doing, although it's still a struggle for me in a big way to teach the way that I want to...Just being more comfortable in the classroom, feeling

like I'm part of the community, and I know a lot of people. I have learned how to talk about teaching. Management has become easier and more like second nature.

When asked to elaborate on why he feels it is a struggle for him to teach the way he wants to, he responded, "Oh, just skill. It's very hard to do all of that. I'm just not great at it. I have tried to get better, but it's hard...I haven't gotten to the point where I've been a good enough teacher."

Susan also pushes herself to continue to be more effective in her teaching practice. She has taken it upon herself to search for ideas that provide a "creative spark" for her in her twelfth year of teaching. Susan explained, "We don't really have a lot of resources here...Every year, we're reinventing the wheel to come up with new stuff."

Throughout each of the interviews, the teachers spoke of struggling with feeling a sense of competence in their jobs, overcoming that, and continuing to pursue a greater sense of competence into their second stage of teaching. Although the basic psychological need for competence was often discussed by the participants, it was just one of the three needs in which they sought fulfillment. The needs for relatedness and autonomy were also expressed in the interviews as the participants shared their experiences.

### **Relatedness in Teaching**

Like the need for competence, the need for relatedness was discussed by each participant in the study. Participants described their feelings of connectedness with their colleagues. They spoke of the importance of these relationships throughout their teaching careers. Having a sense of relatedness with their colleagues provides the teachers in this study with shared experiences. They have others in their lives who can understand what they are going through and commiserate or celebrate with them. The participants also talked in their interviews about how experiencing fulfillment of the need for relatedness has helped them fulfill their need for competence.

**Shared experiences.** Most of the participants in this study described feeling connected to their colleagues and how these connections helped them navigate the day-to-day events in their teaching careers. Robin explained that although not everyone at Skyline High is close, “in this department, we’re all close. We always say this is the best department to be in...Everybody in this department gets along.” She explained that they will often “get off track when we’re in a meeting” because they want to share with one another the things they are going through in both their professional and personal lives. She also explained that “they normally all come in [her classroom] for lunch,” and they eat together in Robin’s classroom on a daily basis. Mark and Ned, colleagues at Anderson High School in the same department, also spoke of feeling fulfillment of their need for relatedness with their colleagues. Mark shared that early on in his career, he was given leadership roles, which made him feel disconnected from his colleagues. However, that changed for him when new colleagues, such as Ned, began teaching alongside him. He explained:

There were a couple of years there where it was almost like I had been promoted beyond my stature. And I feel like that may have been a little isolating for a couple of years. And then probably around year four or five, we just got a huge influx of teachers that were closer to my age group, and that I was just able to click with really easily. So in the last four years or so, it’s been supportive, but more from a peer standpoint. I’ve got a lot of people here in the building that I feel very comfortable going to with problems, I feel very comfortable collaborating with, and it’s more than collegial. I’m really good friends with a lot of people here at the school at this point.

Ned also described the importance of the relationships he had formed with his colleagues, and how those relationships help each of them navigate the teaching job. He described a challenging

work environment early in his career, with difficult interactions between the administrator and teachers. He explained that he and his colleagues were able to develop a close-knit group during this time:

I overheard something that Mark said, and I want to echo that... We had such good relationships... We would see each other socially outside of school. It actually started with Friday afternoon going and getting a beer. And we just, the group kind of grew. It's not every week anymore, but it used to be regularly, and we would go and let off some steam, be real unprofessional for a while. And then we started seeing other socially, and it was really fun. That was huge.

Going out with colleagues after work also helped Julia fulfill her need for relatedness, particularly early on in her career. She explained, "I also started teaching with two new teachers who are good friends of mine. We created our own happy hour team and had that community, and that really helped."

The elementary teachers in this study also described the importance of fulfillment of the need for relatedness. Elisha explained that all of the members of her grade level team get along well with one another and have open lines of communication. She talked about developing a strong sense of relatedness with her team members early on in her career and how that has continued through her second stage:

A lot of teams operate, it's me, my classroom, I'm going to do what I need to do, or I'm not going to do that. And that's where some issues arise. My team since I started has been a pretty cohesive team... One of my colleagues, we started together, and we're still together. And just having one person makes a big difference. So the two of us have been operating together. My first resident is on our team, so it's like she's been with us for

three years already because she was with me for a whole year...My other teammate's been with us for four years. So we're very lucky in that regard.

Kelly and Susan also expressed the importance of having a close relationship with at least one colleague. Susan explained that when she began teaching, she developed a close relationship with a fellow new teacher:

We went to the new teacher institute together, and we became kind of instant friends.

And we were on the same grade level. It was nice to have her because we kind of were like we're new together, we were the same age, and we ended up hanging out together out of school a lot.

This relationship helped her through her first years as a teacher. Susan explained, "It was nice to have that person to do the struggles with of being a new teacher." Kelly explained that she and Susan became friends on the day she started working at Silverleaf Elementary. She said, "She [Susan] was my mentor...It was nice to have someone who had been here for a few years kind of giving you the rundown of make sure you do this or make sure that this is done." In their interview, in which they participated together, Susan and Kelly also described the importance of their relationship and how this helps them navigate each work day. The following is the exchange between the two of them during their interview in response to a question asking what gets them through challenges in the workplace:

Kelly: Your work best friend.

Susan: Yeah, your bestie. Literally, I can't survive without her. We laugh, cry, celebrate with each other.

Kelly: You have to find your person.

Susan: 100%



Kelly: Whether your person's at your school with you, or on a different team, or on your team, or whoever, you have to have that person that can just fully understand what you're going through.

Susan: And even if that person doesn't work with you forever, you still know that you can talk about the same things, and you both get it.

Kelly: That's how we get through everything.

Susan: That's my person.

Catherine also spoke of the importance of developing relationships with colleagues early on in her career. She shared that at the beginning of her career, "I felt really isolated. There were two or three colleagues that helped me along the way because I think they felt the same way. They were relatively new to this community as well." She shared that over the years at Cherry Blossom Elementary, there have been staff changes, which have led to a greater sense of community across the school. Through this, she feels a sense of relatedness with her colleagues. She said, "We have a really close community of adults. I feel very confident that I could go to anyone here with a problem, or a happy thought, or anything." Gina also spoke of a sense of schoolwide relatedness. She had originally worked at a different elementary school in City Public Schools before moving to Silverleaf Elementary. She shared that from the beginning, she has felt connected to her colleagues. She said, "It was just that family vibe. We had each other's backs." Gina went on to share the closeness of her grade level team. She stated, "I love my team. And we've sort of bonded together to the exclusion of everything that's happening. We make sure that everything is up and running." The team members have been there for one another through changes in school administration, weddings, and maternity leave. Fulfillment of the need for relatedness allowed some of the participants in the study to feel as though they were

going through their professional and personal experiences with at least one other person who understood them. For some, relatedness also played a role in helping them fulfill their need for competence.

**The relatedness and competence connection.** As previously discussed, many of the teachers in this study did not feel a sense of competence early on in their teaching career. In their interviews, several of the participants described how their relationships with colleagues influenced the fulfillment of their need for competence. In some instances, the teachers themselves described reaching out to others when they needed help doing their job. In other instances, through established relationships, colleagues simply offered advice, support, or space to help the participants develop competencies.

Mark explained that when he first began his teaching career and was feeling a lack of competence, he was not assigned to his own classroom. Instead, he taught classes in other teachers' classrooms. He explained that through the relationships he had with these colleagues, and his mobile position, he was able to receive the support he needed to fulfill his need for competence:

In hindsight, it was a real blessing that I didn't have my own classroom, and so I was sharing classrooms with all of the other teachers in my content area. Don't get me wrong, they tried to give me all the space that they could afford me, and I was more or less in the classrooms on my own, but they were around enough to know when I was really struggling. And they were able to kind of give me the emotional support that I appreciated, as well as some constructive but very honest criticism at times that kind of pushed me toward making some very, very necessary changes that for whatever reason I was just reluctant to make.

When Joseph began teaching at Barry Middle School, he, like all new teachers in City Public Schools, was assigned a mentor to help guide him through. He explained that this relationship did not help him become more competent. Instead, a relationship with another colleague who took it upon himself to become Joseph's mentor provided the support Joseph needed to become more competent in his teaching position. He shared:

My first year here, my mentor teacher here did nothing for me. And then, the content specialist, he was still a mentor here. He came in my room one day and said hey, I'm your mentor. I was like I don't have a mentor. I already had one, and I don't need another. And he's like really? How was your day today? And I was like horrible. So he went through stuff with me, and he's like I'll come back.

Joseph explained that this relationship with the content specialist was the only truly supportive relationship he had at the beginning of his career, yet it helped him become more effective in his classroom teaching.

Some of the teachers in this study received space from their colleagues, which provided them with what they needed to become more competent. When Julia began teaching at Vista High School, she became part of a department team that was overseen by a department chair. Teachers in the department were required to submit lesson plans to the department chair, however, Julia did not do this. Julia described her department team and chair as being very supportive and understanding of her early career struggles. They provided her with the room she needed to develop competencies. She shared:

I've always felt supported by specifically my department team. My department chair was very understanding of why I would not submit lessons. I said I always have my agenda.

I knew exactly what I was doing, but I spent hours just preparing. Yeah, so they were very understanding and supportive.

Similarly, Elisha explained that from the beginning of her career, her relationships with her grade level team members have been important to her and have helped her do what she needed to do to fulfill her need for competence:

I worked with a really great team of teachers...when I came in, my team at the time, I said well what's going to be, they did team planning, and I said what will my part be? And they were like, you just have to make it through. You don't focus on this piece, you focus on the instruction, and we'll take care of the lesson planning. If you have questions, you can come to us. And if you need to change it to meet your class's needs, that's fine. But we want to take this off your plate. And I don't think that's something that a lot of teachers have, so it's really awesome and very helpful.

While many of the participants in the study shared that they did not seek help from others, they instead received the support they needed to develop a greater sense of competence without asking, some did seek help from their colleagues. When Thomas shared in his interview that he struggled with feeling a sense of competence at the beginning of his career in terms of collecting and managing the required data, he was asked what he did to develop those competencies. He responded, "I asked other teachers." Liam also struggled in the beginning of his career and developed relationships to help him become more effective. He shared:

I will say that I sought help often and from many different places. I developed relationships with the people I saw as the best teachers in the school. I developed relationships with the principals and librarians, with other new teachers and veteran teachers. And these relationships really buoyed me, and supported me, and helped me

maintain some level of morale. But then I also sought help from my instructional specialist...So I think feeling unprepared but feeling like maybe I could do a good job if I worked hard enough or something motivated me to ask for a lot of help, which I did.

As shown above, analysis of the data revealed that having a sense of relatedness with colleagues was connected to developing a sense of competence for many of the participants.

As previously discussed, neither Danielle nor Jake struggled with feeling a lack of competence at the beginning of their teaching career. Although they did not necessarily need to seek help, they too explained how they knew they could reach out to their colleagues if they needed to. When asked what would she have done if she had needed to reach out for help at the beginning of her career, Danielle responded:

Oh, I knew people! My cooperating teacher, who still worked here at the time, I would go to her. My department head was my co-teacher, so I could go to her. It's like people say, it's not what you know, it's who you know. I knew people in the building. I was comfortable. If I didn't know something about technology, I already knew the person who was the ITRT. It was easy to develop those relationships.

Jake also explained how his pre-existing relationships from his pre-service preparation in the same building provided a support network, although he did not necessarily need it. He said, "I had my mentor in the building. She was my next door neighbor, and she was my friend. She would have been there for me had I needed her."

In addition to relatedness with colleagues playing a role in participants' fulfillment of the need for competence, one participant also attributed this to the relationship she had with her administrator. Catherine explained struggling at the beginning of her career. She said, "We had mentors in place. They were not trained to give me the support that I needed to feel successful."

She turned to her administrator, who had hired her as a teacher at Cherry Blossom Elementary. Catherine said, “I was terrified, but she believed in me, and she helped me through my first year tremendously.” Although none of the other participants spoke of a sense of relatedness with their administrators, relatedness with colleagues did seem to be connected to increasing competence for many participants, and fulfillment of each of these needs was discussed often throughout the interviews.

### **Autonomy in Teaching**

The need for autonomy was the least discussed of the three basic psychological needs for this group of teachers. Although the topic was not addressed often in the interviews, participants did share feeling fulfillment of this need. Some described experiences in which they were granted the freedom to make decisions by their administrators, while others described experiences in which they chose to make decisions for themselves regardless of policies and administrative decisions.

**Autonomy given.** Although autonomy was the least discussed of the three basic psychological needs, some teachers in the study did share that their school administrators provided them with the freedom to be autonomous. Jake explained that he felt autonomous from the beginning of his career, which he attributed to his pre-service teacher preparation and subsequent transition to teaching. Upon the completion of his pre-service preparation program, he became a teacher in the classroom in which he had been training. He stated, “I think because, the benefits of inheriting that classroom from a well-respected teacher, I basically was given the same leeway and just left alone.” Liam’s principal also provided him with a sense of autonomy, which he believes helped him become a better teacher. He shared:

Something that was really important for me as a teacher is he trusted me a bunch...I had these opportunities to participate in the school community and be a professional outside of my classroom, which I think really helped me trust myself. I think that was probably really important for me to grow as a teacher.

Catherine and Elisha also shared how their principals provided them with a sense of autonomy by allowing them to make decisions regarding looping, or moving with their class of students from one grade level to the next. Catherine stated, "My principal's really on board with that concept if it's something you want to do." Elisha talked about discussing the possibility of looping with her students. She said, "If I come solutions first, like hey I've been thinking about this, here's what I'd like to try," her principal is open to her implementing her idea.

In addition to autonomy fulfillment benefitting their professional growth, participants shared other benefits connected to their principals providing them with autonomy. Joseph shared that his current principal at Barry Middle School also gives teachers a great deal of autonomy, which he believes creates a better school atmosphere. He said, "I think teachers have a lot of freedom here. I think it helps with the climate. We don't have a lot of meetings." Although Jake's need for autonomy was fulfilled from the beginning of his teaching career, he noted that not all teachers at his former school were granted the same level of autonomy. Having recently begun teaching at Barry Middle School, Jake agreed with Joseph regarding the level of autonomy given by the administrator to the teachers. He said, "The teachers here are way more independent than my last school. I think they all feel more independent because they're given that level." He then shared an experience he had with the principal that illustrated this. Jake explained that throughout his teaching career in City Public Schools, he had never gone to the district-wide back to school meeting for faculty and staff, stating, "I consider it a giant insult and

a waste of time for me.” Because he was working at a new school, he decided he should go, but first spoke with his principal.

I said I’ll go if you really want me to, but I need you to know that I really am opposed to this, and he just stopped me and said you shouldn’t do anything you don’t feel comfortable doing. He’s like, just go to your room.

Similar to Jake, Gina shared that her principal is someone who gives the teachers the ability to make decisions for themselves. She explained that she has children, and wants to be more mindful of her work-life balance. She shared that she told her administrators that she will do anything required of her during the school day, but “anything past contract hours is for my family.” Gina said, “They’ve been really awesome and understanding with that.”

**Too much autonomy.** Although several teachers did have positive remarks regarding a fulfillment of their need for autonomy, in some instances they felt as though too much autonomy was given. Danielle explained that she feels a certain amount of autonomy, yet is still governed by the larger policies that are in place. She said, “You can teach how you want, but you can’t teach what you want because there’s parameters.” She went on to explain that even with the policies that guide the work teachers do, oftentimes, teachers still have too much autonomy:

It’s not like you’ll always have somebody double checking what you do. So there’s some people that teach wrong the whole year. Or your lesson plan, some people don’t like to write them. This is the first year I ever had a department head who would look at my lesson plans and give me feedback. Every year before that, the person did not look at my lesson plans...I’ve seen people teach the wrong thing...Sometimes it’s kind of like you have too much freedom because you don’t have, I want to say the supports to make sure that you’re doing the right thing.



The lack feedback, or inadequate feedback, was noted by other participants as well. Elisha shared that her first administrator provided feedback about her teaching practice that was not helpful in her development as a teacher. She explained:

She was generally supportive. She always had very nice things to say about what I was doing. She would meet with me and talk to me about any problems I was having. But I never really understood her feedback. And when I would go ask her for clarification, it was still challenging for me to understand.

Thomas described the beginning of his teaching career at Barry Middle School and how the administration seemed to only serve a segment of the teachers. He explained that this resulted in a sense of autonomy, which had pros and cons.

When I first got here, our administration was so disjointed that if you wanted administrative support, you really weren't going to get it. The only people who were getting administrative support were people who were best friends with the administrators...If you were a newer teacher, you didn't have that kind of connection, you were just kind of figuring things out on your own. Which meant that you had to have very tight classroom management, and you needed to be able to handle classroom discipline without any outside help. Conversely, though, one of the benefits of having such disjointed administration is that nobody cared about what was happening in my classroom...If I made a mistake, instead of worrying about somebody breathing down my neck about it, I have time to sit and reflect on it and think well how can I improve this, what did I do wrong, and figure out pacing and things like that on my own.

Unlike Thomas, when Mark first began his teaching career, he did feel as though his school's administration tried to provide support. However, he explained that the sense of autonomy he felt then did not help him navigate the challenges he faced in his first year as a teacher:

They were supportive, but more along the lines of not being overly critical than anything else. I think that the administration recognized that I was trying really hard, that I was working really hard, but they weren't necessarily giving me a whole lot of constructive suggestions or anything like that. Just handling me with white gloves I guess because they didn't want me to quit.

**Autonomy taken.** While much of the data regarding autonomy in teaching shows that the teachers in this study do feel as though they are given autonomy, sometimes even to too great an extent, some of the teachers in the study described situations in which they were not necessarily granted autonomy by their school administrators or the policies of City Public Schools, but instead granted themselves autonomy. For example, when asked if he felt like he had autonomy in his job as a teacher, Ned responded:

Yep. I do, and I've sort of taken that for myself from the beginning...I was just like I'm not doing that, I'm doing this instead of that. I've never once, not once, followed the district pacing guide. They give you this pacing guide, and the lady who developed it comes around to check to see if you're doing it. And I was just like no, I'm not doing that...I've never been in a crisis situation at the end of the year where not enough of the kids have passed the test that my numbers get called into question. So they basically leave me alone...I go in my room, and I close the door and teach. I follow my own pacing. I use my own resources. I do me. And I figured out how to exist in this environment without pissing anybody off. So, you know, when they want me to do

something that I don't agree with, I just, no, I just don't do it. I do what I want, but I don't generally get involved with things that are higher up because why bother? I can do what I want in my kingdom. This is my empire.

Similar to Ned's decision to not teach following the pacing guide, Joseph did not follow the guidelines to teach the materials that would be tested on the district-wide benchmark tests. Also like Ned, Joseph's test results provided him with even more autonomy. He explained:

I've got a lot of freedom here. That's taken me time, but I have a lot of freedom here now. I've always done my lessons the way I wanted to. But when I started here, there were still benchmark tests, and my kids would bomb the benchmarks because I didn't teach to the benchmark. But the SOL, they're above 95%. So that's the first thing that got principals off my back...Management took me a year or two to get better at. That was probably the next thing. I stopped having people checking on me.

Joseph went on to explain that he does not understand how some teachers can complain about not having autonomy in their jobs. He said, "You do have autonomy...If they want a lesson plan, just do the lesson plan. Write it up, it takes half an hour, and then go teach the lesson you want to teach anyways." Elisha also shared how she has granted herself autonomy in her job, particularly in her second stage of teaching. She talked about a specific district-wide mandate, with which she decided to not comply. She explained her experience of autonomy through this and similar decisions:

If someone wants to slap me on the wrist or write me up for this, I can still sleep at night because I know that I'm taking that time and using it effectively and doing something that directly benefits my students' needs. So having a little bit more confidence to make

those decisions and not feel worried that I'm not being compliant...I feel a little more confident in my ability to make decisions, even if it goes against what I'm told to do.

Participants in this study described their experiences as classroom teachers, and analysis of this data produced findings indicating that these experiences helped them feel a fulfillment of the three basic psychological needs. In addition to working as classroom teachers, each of the participants has also held the additional role of being a coach, or mentor teacher, with the Mid-Atlantic Urban Teacher Residency program. Their descriptions of coaching experiences also provide evidence of some need fulfillment through this role.

### **Need Fulfillment Through Coaching Role**

Each of the participants in this study shared their experiences of being a coach with the residency program. Their reasons for becoming a coach varied from person to person, but most decided to take on the role simply because they were asked to do so. Regardless of the reasons behind their decisions to take on the role of coach, their experiences of being a coach with the residency program showed that they do experience fulfillment of the needs for competence and relatedness through this role.

**Competence.** Being a coach with the residency program helped fulfill most teachers' need for competence. The teachers were able to develop new competencies as they trained for the role of being a coach and then grew in their coaching practice over time. Participants also shared how their coaching experiences reinforced or further developed feelings of competence in their work as classroom teachers.

**Coaching competencies.** Most of the participants enjoyed the challenge of learning new skills and adapting to having a resident in the classroom, although the initial coaching experience was not easy for everyone. For almost all participants, an increased sense of fulfillment of the

need for competence was a bonus to being a coach; they did not become a coach because they sought fulfillment of this need. Joseph, however, explained that he did become a coach in order to meet his need for competence. He had worked with a student teacher prior to agreeing to work with the residency program. Joseph explained that he signed up to be a mentor because he wanted to develop his skills in that area. He said, “I wanted to be a better mentor in general, so it’s like training for me. It’s selfish. It’s like, I can be a better trainer if I learn from them.”

Others shared their experiences and need fulfillment after becoming a coach.

Julia explained that when she first became a mentor, it was challenging for her:

It was my fourth year of teaching, and I worked so hard to establish myself as a teacher at Vista High School. I was known for being pretty strict. And it was really hard to give up part of my class. It was very challenging also to see another teacher forming more positive relationships with some of my students. I also felt like I often had to be the bad cop.

She also had a challenging time having the necessary conversations with her resident her first year. Julia had to seek help from one of the program leaders, and although it was a tough experience for her, she shared that she did learn from that initial coaching experience, through figuring out how to have “those courageous conversations.” She explained that one important thing to come from that first coaching experience was “learning humility, which is really hard too, to say the way you also do it is ok.” After that first year, Julia’s experiences being a mentor became easier as she became more competent in the role. She shared:

I think part of it is after a few more years teaching, I’m able to step back a little bit. I’m like ok, these are my flaws, these are the benefits of having someone else in the

classroom. And very different personalities too. I think we just established a more professional, yet could also be friendly, relationship.

Similar to Julia, Thomas, who has only had one resident, was challenged by having another person in the classroom. He also grew personally and felt a greater fulfillment of his need for competence through his coaching experience. He explained:

I learned that sometimes I need to let go of control. When you get used to handling everything on your own and then somebody else is introduced into your environment, you have to learn to delegate, and then you have to learn to release...I'm not a type A personality, but I like things done a certain way. And when they're not done that way, it's like why is that not happening the way I thought it should go? And then I need to reflect on that. It was good. It challenged me because it made me much more self-reflective, even more than I thought I had been before.

Susan found the skills she developed as a coach to be useful in helping her communicate with her colleagues and in preparing her for a potential future career in leadership. She shared that she appreciated "being able to manage somebody else and collaboratively talk to them by using the coaching language...I feel like the coaching language has really helped me to figure out some situations in school with coworkers."

***Teaching competencies.*** In addition to becoming more competent in their role as a coach through their coaching experiences, the coaching experiences also influenced participants' fulfillment of the need for competence in their teaching positions. Participants explained that they felt more effective in their teaching practice because they had an additional person in the room; this allowed them to create new materials and focus their attention on students who

needed additional support. Coaching also helped fulfill participants' need for teaching competence through increasing how reflective they were being about their own teaching practice.

The elementary teachers noted that through their role as a coach, they feel a greater sense of competence in their work as classroom teachers. They attributed this to the fact that having an extra person in the room allowed them to focus more on meeting students' needs. Susan shared that being a coach provides her with "time to do other things, like really find new things. We couldn't find the new strategies, the new activities and ideas if we didn't have all of the time." Kelly agreed and said, "Currently right now I'm making stations for the next three months, and just being able to implement those things, I've had them, I just haven't had the time to put them together, to make it." Susan also explained that the students benefit directly from the time she has by having a resident in her room. She said, "I've had the opportunity to be able to pull out struggling readers and struggling students and work with them. So it's just like they get a double dose of instruction and being able to increase their knowledge." Kelly noted, "My kids are getting two teachers. And the power in that is so unreal...It's so much more beneficial for our classrooms."

Similarly, Julia and Ned, both secondary teachers, explained how having the resident in the classroom allowed them to feel more effective in their work as classroom teachers. Julia had taken on two new courses when she was paired with her most recent resident. She shared, "I have a resident who's been helping prepare half the material, so that's amazing. That's been a life saver." Ned also explained how having a resident allowed him to create new materials:

There were some projects that I wanted to do to improve my teaching, but I felt like I needed a partner. Things like making instructional videos that you can put on YouTube, and just link them to every single homework assignment...I wanted a partner to sort of

help me get that rolling. And there were a few other things like that where I wanted to do some things, try some new changes to my practice because I finally had the bandwidth to think about it...I think in a lot of ways, both of us are going to be richer for it next year.

In addition to coaching providing the teachers with extra time to work with students in their classroom and create materials for their students, being a coach improved their own teaching practice in other ways. Some of the teachers shared how being a coach helped them learn or reconsider strategies for instruction and classroom management. For example, Robin explained, "When I go through and see the strategies or the techniques we used to help the resident, it's like oh yeah, this is why we do this when we teach." Ned, who was working with his first resident at the time of the interview shared:

The interesting thing that I found working with him is, I'm not the strongest classroom manager myself...So I've been learning a lot about classroom management right along with him...It's a quicker learning curve. But the thing I realized was how much I know that I didn't realize I know. Things like, you have to stand by the doorway to greet the kids. They tell you that over and over and over and over again, and I do it most of the time, but I never realized why I do it. And I'm like oh, I know why I do it...Let's get our heads on straight before you come into my room. It's a management technique that's really important, and I never knew why I do it, other than they just told me to do it. So there's a lot of things that I know that I am realizing what I know now because of the conversations that we have. I'm more metacognitive than I used to be.

Similar to Ned, Catherine noted that she also was able to grow in her teaching practice through learning alongside her residents:



When you learn something when you're older and more mature, and actually in the profession, you're teaching, you kind of retain it more. You can go to school the next day and try it. Versus in college, you're just learning it to get through the test...going through the training definitely has helped me become a better teacher because I'm able to learn from that conference and bring it back and apply it the very next day and share that with my resident, different strategies, and especially from colleagues and other coaches. Definitely. And more reflective. I never did any of that. And that's hard to be reflective, especially on yourself.

Elisha also shared that being a coach increased her competence by exposing her to new instructional strategies. The act of being able to observe someone else teaching also helped fulfilled her need for competence through being reflective about her own teaching practice as she observed:

I've learned some strategies from the residents that I've implemented. It also just makes me think, sometimes when I'm sitting outside or sitting in the back of the classroom and I'm hearing, like ooh, that's a lot...just makes me think about how I'm addressing the class, how I might sound to an outside observer, how the students are receiving the information. It makes me a little bit more mindful about what are the students doing. When we're doing a whole group lesson, what are they doing?...Just kind of shifting the focus so that I'm not stuck in a groove of here we do whole group, I talk at you, you listen, and then you go do your thing. It's thinking about ways to make the students take a little bit more ownership of their learning.

Jake too explained that having been a coach impacted the way he teaches and helps him be more competent in his work as a classroom teacher, particularly because of the reflection component

in the coaching role. He stated, “It’s very useful to be reflective, so I like that.” Jake then explained that even though he did not have a resident at the time of the interview, he still tried to be reflective about his teaching practice:

It makes you focus more on doing the things that you learned in school, and not leaning so heavily on the I know I can force this information into them without good practice...That tracks even to when I don’t have a resident because I still think about the seating chart. It’s just in my head. The scripting and trying to bounce things around the room. And having done it twice now, I really think about what would it look like for an observer.

In some instances, the teachers shared that being reflective about their own teaching led to them striving to be as effective as possible while they had a resident in the room. They wanted to show the resident what competence looked like in teaching. For example, Danielle shared:

The things I make them work on, I have to make sure I model it myself. Right now we’re working on shifting the academic struggle to the students. So to model that when I am teaching with him, I do that a lot...I try to show him that you explaining it is great, but look at how much more we get done, look at how much faster it gets done if I don’t stay up there just talking to them or at them. Look at how much more they retain, so I can show him this actually works. And then it benefits the kids too.

Similarly, Gina explained that being a coach has improved her teaching practice, and she tries to present the best teaching she can to her residents:

I think it makes me be on my A-game as much as I can because you don’t want to let your resident down...You really want to show them what’s what in teaching and be

honest about it, and really do your best so that they can see best teaching practices in action. So I think that really has upped my game, and it's made me a lot more reflective about my practice, because how can I fuss at you for doing something if I do it too?

Two of the participants also became more reflective through their coaching experiences, which led to them critically examining their teaching practices and contemplating ways to become more effective. Thomas has worked with one resident. He is open to potentially being a coach again, but wanted to apply what he learned about teaching from being a coach to his own teaching practice first. He described his experience as a coach:

During that year I had a crisis of conscience and was just like maybe the way that I've been teaching is not good enough. Maybe I shouldn't have been teaching. Then I thought well maybe I should take some of the things that I've learned working with this guy over the year, and I should apply these to my teaching over the next couple of years and see how it pans out. Which is why I didn't come back as a coach the next year, because I wanted to see ok did I learn something, and will it improve or hinder my teaching practice?

Joseph also explained how his one year of coaching made him more thoughtful about his teaching practice. He shared that being able to see what effective teaching should look like through the process of coaching and evaluating his resident has allowed him to develop competencies in his own teaching practice:

I'm growing. I'm thinking about all this different stuff I'm going to do in my lessons next year that we're adding right now because all of the requirements they're looking at make me think, oh I don't hit that, I don't hit that, I don't hit that. When you're looking at an observation and you're hitting all these ideas of what is good, what is bad, what is

great, oh I'm not great at this, I can work on this. I'm not great at this, I have all these great ideas that come from that.

**Relatedness.** In addition to the coaching experiences providing fulfillment of participants' need for competence, they also described experiences of fulfillment of the need for relatedness through coaching. Many were able to develop a professional network through their participation in the program. Those working in schools with other coaches found that their connections with these teachers deepened. For example, Thomas shared, "I like the coaches that I work with. I still hang out and talk with some of them. The coaching relationship was a very good one." Ned also developed relationships with his fellow coaches in his building. He explained that even though he had been working in the same building as several other mentor teachers for years, he did not develop relationships with them until he took on this role. Now, he explains "it definitely is its own little cohort of coaches." Although he has struck up conversations with other mentor teachers across City Public Schools, Ned shared that "being in the same building, I think, is significant" when it comes to developing professional relationships with other coaches in the program. He believes the proximity of this professional network can be useful if support is needed. Ned said, "If you're coaching by yourself in a building, you don't have anybody immediately to ask to if you have a problem." Gina too has been able to develop stronger relationships with her teaching colleagues who also serve as coaches, which has provided support for each of them. She explained, "We're constantly running back and forth, what do we do with this, when is this due, I have this issue I'm not entirely sure how to broach the subject with my resident. You know, just for that advice piece." Julia's experiences as a coach have also fulfilled her need for relatedness, although unlike Ned, she considers herself to be connected to the larger group of coaches beyond her school building. She explained:

I truly appreciate the opportunity to be surrounded by other professionals whom I respect. Honestly, when we have our small group meetings, that's where I do think I take the time to really reflect and think about my practice as a coach and take away ideas from other coaches too. So I definitely value that network, and I think that is a community that I am proud to be a member of.

Catherine also values the network of “wonderful, wonderful teachers” who serve as coaches. Like Julia, she enjoys the meetings with her fellow coaches and thinks these are a useful time for “sharing lessons and sharing ideas.”

### **RQ 1 Conclusion**

Participants in this study shared details of their work as classroom teachers in City Public Schools and position as coaches with the residency program throughout various time points of their career. Analysis of the interview data revealed numerous instances in which they described the basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Competence and relatedness were discussed by all of the participants in the study. While Danielle and Jake shared feeling competent from the beginning of their teaching careers, a fact they attributed to their unique experience of completing an alternative teacher preparation program in the schools in which they became teachers, every other participant described feeling a lack of competence in the novice stage of the teaching career. They talked about how they were able to move through this and begin to feel fulfillment of the need for competence as they entered the second stage of teaching. In many instances, fulfillment of the need for relatedness helped them achieve this. Through the relationships they developed with colleagues, the participants were able to receive feedback and support that helped them gain competence. Additionally, some were given space to grow by colleagues who took on some of their work responsibilities, such as lesson planning.

Although it was not discussed as much as the needs for competence and relatedness, fulfillment of the need for autonomy was seen in the data. Some participants shared fulfillment of this need through autonomy-supportive administrators, and others explained how they made decisions for themselves, regardless of the requirements and policies under which they worked. A couple of participants even shared how they felt there was too much autonomy in their work as teachers; despite policies and mandates governing their work, a lack of feedback and oversight led to teachers being able to do whatever they wanted, even if it was not in the best interests of their students.

While fulfillment of the three needs was discussed primarily through participants' experiences working as classroom teachers, they did share instances in which their needs for competence and relatedness were met through their experiences as a coach. Serving as a coach provided fulfillment of the need for competence for many of the study's participants. They were able to grow in their own teaching practice through being more reflective as they tried to model high-quality teaching and through learning alongside their residents. Additionally, they developed new competencies as they learned coaching skills and strategies. Being a coach with the Mid-Atlantic Teacher Residency program also helped fulfill the teachers' need for relatedness. They described being able to create a professional network of fellow coaches in City Public Schools, particularly with others working in their same schools. The needs for competence and relatedness were met through coaching, however the data did not show the need for autonomy in the participants' coaching experiences.

## **RQ 2 - Experiences of Job Satisfaction**

The second research question explored how the participants experience job satisfaction through their work as teachers and their role as coaches. When they discussed their work as

teachers, they explained feeling a sense of satisfaction regarding many elements of their jobs, including the relationships they have developed through the job. A sense of satisfaction was also found in the coaching role they took on, and for some, serving as a coach also influenced their sense of satisfaction in their teaching job. However, some participants did share experiences of dissatisfaction through their work and explained how their enjoyment of the job has changed over the course of their careers.

### **Experiences of Satisfaction**

Participants shared experiences of job satisfaction in their work as classroom teachers. Some shared that they simply love what they do. In some instances, the love of their work came in spite of or even because of the challenges they faced. For example, Gina explained that there are many parts of the job that give her a sense of satisfaction:

I really love my job. There have been times when I was looking online to see what other things I would be qualified to do. But when it comes right down to it, I love what I do... I love the challenge of it...Some of my most challenging days have been teaching in City Public Schools, but I'm very strong in my conviction that any challenge is a learning experience. And so I know that I've grown a lot. And while I may have gotten there somewhere else eventually, it was sort of a crash course. And I think it's made me a stronger teacher. It's made me a stronger person. It's toughened my skin. So I think I've really enjoyed what I've been doing, even on the hard, terrible days that come along with it.

Diana too noted that from early in her career as a teacher, she felt a great deal of job satisfaction:

It was a great experience because these kids were all low income, and they needed what I was providing. So for me very early on in my career, teaching became a way for me to

help students not only educationally, but just giving them the nurture that they didn't have from home unfortunately. So I felt like I'm where I'm supposed to be... I want to stress that I love teaching.

Liam also noted several components of his teaching job that influence his sense of job satisfaction:

I love my schedule right now. I like waking up early. I like being at school every day. I like the variety of interactions that I have every day. I interact with so many different kinds of people, in the form of students, and also teachers, and administrators, and parents. I get to think creatively to try to solve a million different problems all the time.

Julia too explained that the challenge of the job contributes to her enjoyment. She said, "I enjoy the challenge of trying to create engaging lesson plans. It's like a game in itself."

Some teachers shared that they felt a sense of job satisfaction or enjoyment in their work because of the students with whom they work. Joseph shared, "I like my job. I love teaching. It's about them [pointed to students in the room]. I love it." Julia also shared that the students were an important part of her job satisfaction. She said, "I love being part of Vista High. I love the kids." Thomas explained:

I'm satisfied with my job. I'd say very. I like where I'm at. I like the kids for the most part. There's always a couple that drive you nuts, and they're the names that you'll always remember...I think that's just the way it goes. I like the job. I like what I'm doing. I think I'm fairly decent at it. I'm not the best at it, but I'm decent enough to keep going.



## **Satisfaction in Mentoring**

Most of the participants shared that they enjoyed being a mentor in the residency program. Participants noted several reasons for their enjoyment of the role, including feeling a new passion for their work as a classroom teacher through what they have learned as a coach. However, they did point out that the coaching role brings its own set of challenges. Elisha shared that although being a coach adds to her workload, she does find satisfaction in the role:

I do like it. I really like the teaching of teachers...All of my coworkers are like oh, there's two of you, you can take a break. But it is more work. Because at the end of the day, I'm still responsible for the kids' scores. I have not taken a break from teaching. I still pull kids every single day, and then we stay late to reflect, and troubleshoot, and plan, and prepare.

Robin noted that there were challenges involved in coaching, but she ultimately enjoyed the experience. She said, "I don't know if I would do it again because I didn't like leaving my classroom," but then changed her mind when she thought about the enjoyment she got out of the program. She explained, "I'm getting some adult time to say this is why you're here, and it rejuvenates you for the next year, so I'm like well maybe I would...It was really worthwhile." Kelly also commented on the required meetings, saying "It's definitely worth all the trainings and sitting through those meetings, and going to one a month even, because you get to talk with other people that are going through the same stuff as you. I've really enjoyed it." Joseph shared that he did not enjoy the required meetings. Although he ultimately believes being a coach is a worthwhile experience, he did not seem to exude the same level of satisfaction in the role as did other participants:

It's just too much talking. All these meetings... You're taking me out of my classroom six days out of the school year. I don't want to be out of my classroom any days... I value the program. I value the way it works. I value the professionalism and the reflective nature of the practice.

While some of the participants focused on the challenging aspects of the mentoring role, some only commented on the positives. For example, Susan shared that she still feels enjoyment in her work as a teacher, in part from mentoring and in part because of the new ideas she and Kelly have learned:

I think that if I didn't do this program, I might have been burnt out before now. I'm still not burnt out. I still have all these fresh ideas I'm ready to do. We went to this awesome conference last year that really re-sparked us. We're just like wow, we're ready to do everything! So I'm still into the classroom. I'm still not like ugh, I'm ready to be gone.

Catherine shared her opinion of being a mentor stating, "I really, really enjoy it. I enjoy the extra level of professionalism. I enjoy the other coaches, and the meetings, and just talking about the craft of teaching." Similarly, Gina explained, "I love mentoring new teachers... I love being able to work with new teachers and give them a fighting chance to be successful in City Public Schools or any urban area." She went on to explain that she also enjoyed the collaborative teaching component of the program. She shared, "Co-teaching was another thing on my bucket list. It's a pretty awesome responsibility, but I love that too."

### **Sources of Dissatisfaction**

In many instances, the participants shared feelings of dissatisfaction with their work as classroom teachers. These feelings of dissatisfaction were shared primarily when describing

challenging workplace culture, including feeling as though they were not treated as professionals. Participants' discussions of dissatisfying elements of their jobs often accompanied statements of job satisfaction. For example, although she expressed her satisfaction with her work as a teacher as noted above, Gina also shared that not all elements of her job are enjoyable. She said, "I love being in the classroom. I don't really like the bureaucracy of education." She then described policies that she felt hindered her work as a teacher:

We're not here to teach them how to take a multiple choice test, but we're here to give them a love of learning so that they can think for themselves and be productive adults. They keep saying that we're training them for jobs that haven't been invented yet, but you're not allowing us the freedom to actually do that. That gets very frustrating.

Similarly, Diana explained that while she loves working with her students and gets great satisfaction from that component of her job, there are other dissatisfying elements, particularly stemming from district-wide policy decisions:

Everybody's got to jump through hoops to accommodate whatever it is that they want at that time. I know me personally, I'm tired of it. And I think I rebel against it a little because I got to the point where, so when do I actually get to teach my kids? After I do all the little bells and whistles that you read and heard about? When do I actually get to teach them? You want to make me better, then give me some professional development that I can actually use. Don't give me stuff that I already know and probably found myself and implemented in my classroom, and then you found someone to do a halfway job with it in teaching me because it's kind of insulting to my intelligence. I'm sitting there because I'm mandated to sit there, but you're not really giving me anything to be successful in my classroom.

Danielle expressed how much she enjoys her work as a teacher, specifically because she loves working with her students. However, she spoke of a workplace climate that prevented her from experiencing full job satisfaction:

We had a new principal. We had an interim principal for a while, which was the assistant principal, it got a little crazier, but it was pretty much under control because it was the same leadership for the most part. And then they sent her to a different school and sent a principal who was an assistant principal there, who applied to be a principal at this school. So they flip-flopped them...She came in with what she knew, which was not what we were used to. So I saw a shift of we're a family, everybody's helping each other, to basically we're in crisis mode, and every man for himself. It's crazy in the hallway, but I'm going to close my door because I can control what happens in my room type thing. And then we lost like 40 staff members, so then it was almost a brand new staff...It's terrible here.

## **RQ 2 Conclusion**

The data presented as findings for research question 2 show teachers' experiences of job satisfaction and dissatisfaction in their work as classroom teachers. Several participants spoke of loving their jobs, which stemmed primarily from loving their students. They enjoy interacting with their students and creating instruction that meets their students' needs. They did describe facets of their work that cause them to feel dissatisfied. These sources of dissatisfaction were challenges in the workplace, such as changes in administration and system-wide policies that the participants felt interfered with their teaching practice.

Additionally, the teachers shared their experiences of satisfaction in their role as a coach. Almost every participant expressed enjoying their coaching role. They shared that they liked

working with the residents, and in many cases, being a coach helped them feel a greater sense of job satisfaction in their work as teachers. Being a coach provided some participants with a renewed interest in their work as classroom teachers.

Several of the participants in the study did not explicitly state feelings of satisfaction or dissatisfaction. Instead, they shared experiences from both their work as a teacher and role as a coach and often described how these components played a role in their career decisions, which will be discussed in the following section.

### **RQ 3 - Career Decisions**

The third research question examined how participants' experiences as a classroom teacher and coach influenced their career decisions. While the question specifically asked how these experiences influence their decision to stay, the findings discussed in this section also reveal how some reached the decision to leave, whether to move to a new school in City Public Schools or to leave the district entirely. Five of the teachers, Diana, Gina, Jake, Joseph, and Robin, had worked as a classroom teacher in at least one other school in the district prior to participating in this study. Each had made the decision to leave their previous positions for different reasons. In some of the cases, they shared this decision-making process in the interview, and in others they did not. Likewise, five participants in this study, Susan, Diana, Jake, Liam, and Ned decided to leave their teaching positions at the end of the school year in which this study was conducted, again for different reasons. Findings for this research question are presented below, beginning with vignettes of each individual participant, which contain interview excerpts regarding the participants' experiences and career decisions. Following the same format as the presentation of the case descriptions, the vignettes are presented in two

sections, elementary vignettes, and secondary vignettes. After the presentation of the vignettes, a few key themes that emerged from the data are presented.

### **Elementary Vignettes**

**Catherine.** Details from Catherine's interview show that she did contemplate leaving early in her career as a teacher. However, she persevered and continues make the decision to remain in her position as a classroom teacher at Cherry Blossom Elementary School. The following excerpt begins just after she described feeling a lack of competence at the beginning of her teaching career. It continues through her description of her job experiences that may help her stay or leave, as well as her current career decision:

Interviewer: Did you ever think about leaving?

Catherine: Yes. Oh, yes. I begged my husband...One specific October, I remember it was October, sobbing to my husband, and he was like ok, this is too much. You're obviously not happy, you don't feel like yourself, you don't know what you're doing, let's give it to December, and if it's still this bad, call it quits. We'll figure it out financially, and you'll do something else...And so I did. I don't remember a single moment that clicked, but something did, something clicked right before Christmas break, and I was like ok I'm strong enough to do this. I can do it. I can push through. And I did. And then things got better after Christmas break.

Interviewer: Do you think that being a coach has any influence on you continuing to teach?

Catherine: Yes. I think what I shared with you earlier about just getting burnt out, I think that happens really quickly if you don't find little extra things to keep you motivated and keep you on your toes. I think the routine of the day can be boring, really.

Unless you spice it up a little bit and take on extra tasks, extra challenges. So this was definitely an extra challenge for me that I've really enjoyed. So I still get to be with kids, I still get to teach, but I get this extra bit of professionalism helping this new young teacher hopefully have the same passion that I have...I know that there comes a point, I mean I've seen it with teachers, where they don't enjoy the day to day conversations, and the day to day tasks, and just the business of it all. And I can see myself reaching a point, I don't know when, I'm not there now, but I'm very open to the fact that that might happen. And I'll bow out, like it was a good run, I can do something else. The kids deserve someone who wants to be there wholeheartedly...But, the reason why I will leave won't be because of the kids. I fear it will be because of the mundane clerical tasks that are attached to teaching. I don't have any plans to leave right now. Like I said, my principal is so supportive...I think in five years, as long as my principal's here, I'll probably be here...I will still be teaching somewhere in five years.

**Elisha.** After describing the challenges she faced at the beginning of her career, as presented in the findings for research question one, Elisha explained that she did not consider quitting teaching because "I'm a glutton for punishment." She then explained that she considered "what it would be like for me at a different school," but decided to stay where she was because "I really like these kids. And with leadership changing so much, I felt a responsibility to still be here for our students because they kept seeing so much change." She shared the challenges she currently faces in her teaching position and how these challenges influence her career decisions:

We barely get to go to the restroom, to take a deep breath. I mean, we have on-duty lunch sometimes. We have on-duty recess. You are isolated in your classroom with 6-

and 7-year olds, and it's a lot. And then there's no real way that you can walk through the door at 8:30 and leave at 4:30 and be prepared for teaching the next day, unless you're taking all of your work home with you, which is too much. The demands are just high. There's less support staff, and there are less resources...I'm in my seventh year. I have two babies at home. So I'm like, you spend all your time thinking about other people's children, and it's just exhausting work. And it's not that you don't want to do it, but certainly more money would be good...I think it's nearly impossible to sustain a career given the support that teachers are given...I think there's a time limit to how effective you can be...I genuinely like these kids, and families, and their personalities, and just all that they bring to school every day. But yeah, it seems like it has a time limit.

Elisha then explained that through her experiences as a coach, she has become interested in a career that involves more of that. She shared, "I would like to be a coach of new teachers. I think I would like to step away from the classroom while my kids are little."

**Gina.** Gina is the only one of the elementary teacher participants who did not begin her teaching career at her current work location. She began her teaching career at a different elementary school in City Public Schools, and explained that the job was "sort of like trying on a wrong size coat. It didn't feel quite right or natural." Gina made the decision to leave that school because of challenges she could no longer handle:

I think it was just so overwhelming that I really got to the point after three years of being there that it was either I move to a different school, or I stop teaching altogether. I was just at that point. Just the stress and the constant instability, not really knowing what was going to happen during the day...It was just very overwhelming. Good experience, but very overwhelming at the time.



Interviewer: You were faced with this kind of dilemma of quit totally or go somewhere else. Why didn't you quit?

Gina: I felt that I was doing some real good. You know, you have families that are in dire need...I really felt coming in that I was making a real difference, and that children had a fighting chance when they left my classroom that they might not have otherwise had. And really, it was very hard making the decision to leave because I didn't want to leave because I loved the children. I loved the community. But yeah, it was just too much...So coming here, I did struggle, but I feel like this was just a much calmer, more peaceful place. And it was different, not so much in who was coming here, but it just, I don't know, it just had this air about it. It really felt like it was a place I could heal from everything that had been going on before and sort of get myself back together, re-find my love of teaching.

Gina then explained that her current work environment has proven to be a much better place for her. She shared that her experiences at her current school have influenced her decision to stay:

We had a serious behavior issue in our class at the beginning of this year, and as soon as somebody would call to the office, they would come running. I really could not have done without the help of my team and the admin. It's so important. Because otherwise, I probably would have switched schools again. It makes a big difference when you're not being supported by your administration.

She then described other factors that influence her career decisions:

You can't get bogged down with a lot of the things that go on behind the scenes. That's really one of the ways that has kept me. I think I'm a pretty positive person. Some days it doesn't feel like it but I think on the whole, everything's a learning experience and to

stay positive, tomorrow's a new day...And I think having that separation of home life and work life is really key to that too, which I did not have before I had children...When you don't have that balance, that's really when you burn out.

When asked if being a coach has played a role in her decision to continue teaching in City Public Schools, Gina responded, "It actually has. It's kept me in City Public Schools longer than I might have been." She said, "I was actually thinking of moving to the county, but I'd really like to keep doing this." However, she also believes that there will come a point when she can no longer continue working as a classroom teacher; the experiences she has had as a coach may then influence her future career decisions:

I guess just when I get too frustrated or tired of it all, I'll move on, but I'm not there yet...I love being in the classroom. I don't really like the bureaucracy of education. I guess I would probably try teaching in the county or trying to shift into a different role of helping new teachers because I really like that too. This has given me a different passion for education.

**Kelly.** As described in the findings of research question one, Kelly did not have a sense of competence at the beginning of her teaching career. However, she did not contemplate quitting during her novice stage:

My fourth year was my hardest. I had a really rough class. And I never really wanted to leave, but it was just a constant thing that popped up in the back of my head. But it made me re-evaluate how I was teaching and made my teaching better because of it. So I never was actually going to leave, but the idea popped in my head, how am I supposed to do this the rest of my life?

She shared that what gets her through the challenging times is her “work best friend,” Susan. Kelly also explained that becoming a more established professional during her second stage has influenced her career decisions:

The first three years, you’re just kind of down, at least I was. You’re more focused on just surviving and getting your classroom, just being all you can be for your kids. And what I’ve noticed even just in the past two years, growing into the school, doing more things, because I’m more comfortable now in the classroom...I think what really has led me to wanting to stay in the teaching role is this program, the residency program because I see a little bit of myself in the residents...It’s just nice to see that you were able to help somebody maybe not struggle as much as you did.

Kelly is currently working toward a master’s degree in administration. She said, “I’m not ready to get out of the classroom yet, so even when I have the administration part, it’ll just be nice to have it in my back pocket. When I’m ready to use it, it’s there.”

**Susan.** Susan explained that although her job as a classroom teacher was challenging from the beginning, she was committed to it and did not consider leaving during her novice stage. She said, “I had always said coming out that I wanted to stay somewhere between three and five years...I’m not a job jumper, so I just wanted to make sure that I stayed somewhere and established myself as a professional.” Now in her second stage, she has given more thought to her future in teaching. She explained that her school lacks resources that other schools in the district have and believes that if schools are to be held to the same standard, the district needs to “make it a fair playing ground for everybody.” She shared that she and Kelly have “done a lot for this school, and we feel very undervalued, underappreciated, and not respected,” and that

with recent changes in administration, she is considering leaving. Susan also explained that her work as a classroom teacher has affected her personal life:

People say why don't you have another kid, and I'm like I can't afford it. My husband and I both work very good jobs. We both work two jobs... I mean we're fine, but we're not out here going on vacation because we still have to pay our bills. And teaching does not pay...I've been here 12 years, so it's obviously not that bad. But I'm ready to see what else is out there. I'm ready to see what other support is available...I enjoy coming to work because of Kelly. I mean, my kids obviously, but I enjoy it because I get to see her every day.

When asked if being a coach with the residency program has contributed to her decision to stay, Susan responded:

Yeah. Because when you have your teaching degree, there's only so much you can grow in that. It's not like you can get a raise or a promotion. It's not like they can be like you did really great with that work, I'll make you assistant principal. You can't do that unless you go back to school. We literally have to pay for our promotions. So doing stuff like that, that's our opportunity to grow within our building...I think that if I didn't do this program, I might have been burnt out before now. I'm still not burnt out. I still have all these fresh ideas I'm ready to do...I'm still in the classroom. I'm still not like ugh, I'm ready to be gone.

Susan has gotten her master's degree, and although she plans to continue working as a classroom teacher, she explained, "whenever I am ready to get out of the classroom, it's there to use." At the end of the school year, Susan made the decision to leave City Public Schools to take a job as

a classroom teacher in one of the neighboring counties, which she believes has “more support and more resources.”

### **Secondary Vignettes**

**Danielle.** Although she shared that she felt a sense of competence from the beginning of her career, Danielle described a challenging work environment during her novice stage. She explained that many teachers left the school, with several even taking a pay cut to move to a school in one of the neighboring counties. Despite this, she continued her teaching career at Evergreen Middle School. She explained how she reached this decision and how she continues to reach the decision to stay:

I’ve been here for a long time. I know what to do, so it doesn’t really affect me the way it affects new teachers. If I was a new teacher here, I would feel like I was drowning. But because I’ve been here so long, I know my content...I have a good team, so I’m good. But I know everybody else doesn’t have that...I live five minutes away from here. These are my kids. I’ve taught brothers, sisters. My first kids are about to graduate from high school this year...I feel like I have to wait [the principal] out...I just try to work through it. And the longer you’re here I think, I don’t know if this is true for everyone, but for me, I think the longer I’m here, the more I can tolerate. Now there’s some days where I’m like I don’t know, like I don’t know if I’m going to be able to do this, I don’t think I could do this for 30 years. You know? But then it’s like you learn to, I guess, compartmentalize certain things. Some things I can’t control. Some things I can.

**Diana.** Although she did share in her interview that she had worked as a classroom teacher at several different locations in City Public Schools, and briefly left teaching for a job with an educational organization, Diana did not share much information about how she reached

the decision to leave each of those schools. Instead, she shared more about how her career experiences are currently influencing her decision:

Through the course of the years, it's gotten harder because the world is changing, the kids are changing, and what it required from me at the beginning of my career is now starting to drain me at the end of the year because I give so much of myself. And I stay because, not saying that I have not tried to leave teaching before, but something always comes up at the wrong time...I just can't leave them hanging, and so I found myself staying. But I'm at the point now that I'm getting older, and I feel as if I'm ready to reach the kids in a different way...Here I am again trying to make my exit on a high note...I love those crazy kids. As much as they may drive me crazy, I want to see them successful. But I know that for me to have longevity in my life personally, it's no longer feasible, in my opinion, for teachers to be in this career 30 odd years anymore. It takes a special person to do that because it's so challenging...With everything that we have to do here, and then you have to leave here and get a second job, that's crazy. When you have degrees behind your name, and if you hooked up with the right company, you can flourish with not so much demand, and still leave with less stress...I don't want to be that angry person because my job did that...So me right now, that's where I'm at.

Diana went on to describe the outdated textbooks and lack of other resources she has to deal with in her teaching position. She also explained the challenges of constantly having to test her students. She made the decision to leave at the end of the school year, and while she would no longer be a classroom teacher, she planned to continue working in the field of education. Diana explained, "I still want to be able to reach my kids...Wherever I end up next, it's going to be in

something that's going to allow me to have a voice when making decisions that affect these classrooms.”

**Jake.** Like Diana, Jake had also worked as a classroom teacher at a different school in City Public Schools. He shared details of his job and his career decisions in the following excerpt from his interview:

The last few years I was there, it was actually why I left, I mean there was just a real lack of enforcement of norms at all levels... There would be a set of rules that we would agree on or that would be handed down at the beginning of the year about the dress code, about how students should be walking down the halls, about cellphones, about protocols for what to do with behavior issues and things like that. And some percentage of the teachers would do them, and some percentage would not do them. And because of that, they would almost immediately fall apart... And then that even existed in the relationships between the principal and the teachers too, where you would have these blanket warnings going out via email... But of course, some small percentage of the teachers just wouldn't do that, but there was never any action taken against them... So morale got pretty low.

Interviewer: Have there been moments throughout your teaching career when you've thought about not being a teacher anymore?

Jake: Yeah. I'm actually thinking about it this year... I'm just feeling a little frustrated in my practice this year. It's funny. I moved to a new school to try and kind freshen it up... I wouldn't leave this school after this year because, well for a lot of reasons... But I mean, money, truthfully. I'm basically the sole breadwinner in the house right now... It would be nice to make more money. And you know, I never really envisioned myself being a teacher for 30 years. At all... I do, much to my own displeasure, spend time at

home mostly just thinking about what am I going to do about this student or this class because they're not really getting it. I don't like that. I really feel like I'm betraying my principles when I do that. But I am doing it. I can't not do it...One of the reasons I might leave is because I yearn for a job that I don't take, that isn't on my mind. How nice would it be just to do a job and be done at the end of the day? Money's not everything, but if this job was compensated double the amount that it was, I wouldn't mind taking it home. But when I do now, that makes me resent the job. And I don't want to resent the job. So yes, I do think about it.

Jake ultimately made the decision to leave his job as a classroom teacher. He took a job with an educational organization.

**Joseph.** Joseph's decision to leave his original teaching position to move into his current job was different from Jake's decision. His original teaching position was not one for which he was licensed, so he transitioned to his current position once it was offered to him. He shared that when he first started in his current teaching position, "the climate was bad here." Joseph then explained that "teachers didn't like each other. It's gotten better, a lot better, but teachers would butt heads with the principal." Now, he explains that his school is "very warm." When asked if he ever considered quitting teaching, he responded with one word, "No." Well into his second stage of teaching, Joseph still does not consider quitting his job. He explained, "I'm just starting to figure out what I'm doing...You haven't done anything as a teacher until you've taught many years, so I have no intent to change anything. I'm trying to leave a mark." Joseph also shared that what keeps him teaching is his students. He explained, "It's about them. I love it." However, he did share that he might consider moving to a different school in City Public Schools, a school that he believes is more challenging:



I thought about going to [a City high school] because it's just not a challenge here. But I'm not thinking about that right now. I dropped that idea...I don't have any plans to change anything. I like it here...I got into teaching to help people who need help. If my position could be filled by anyone else, and the kids could get something similar out of it, something comparable out of it, because they already have it all at home, then I don't belong in that environment...I don't want to be helping kids that their parents are already spoon feeding it to them.

**Julia.** In her interview, Julia shared that “there are so many challenges with the school,” including experiencing “times where it was more a culture of fear and gotcha rather than how can I support you.” She shared how her experiences as a classroom teacher and coach have influenced her career decisions:

Interviewer: Did you think about leaving at all during your first three years?

Julia: You know what, I don't think that I did. I've actually thought about leaving more recently...I still had a lot of energy...I knew it was still what I really wanted to do. But I think even after these years when I started seeing colleagues of mine leaving, that's when I started to question it more as far as how sustainable it is.

Interviewer: What are you thinking about that?

Julia: I'm married and I want to start a family. I mean, right now, I can't imagine it...We spend a lot of time talking about is this truly sustainable. And I think that's really it. I still work a part time job. I've been working a part time job since I started teaching. So, I think I'm tired...How can I still be involved in the school, but be able to leave at four o'clock? And I'm not exactly sure...I guess I really want to see change, and I haven't seen that. I don't want to become too jaded, so I think I'm just trying to be

mindful of am I still a strong practitioner, am I still benefitting the students, am I also still taking care of myself. And I just have more question marks next to those now.

Interviewer: So I guess my question then is why do you stay? What keeps you here?

Julia: I love being part of Vista High. I love the kids. I currently teach honors level classes. Even though it has been a challenge teaching two new courses, I have a resident who's been helping prepare half the material, so that's amazing. That's been a life saver. And it honestly does make it a little easier...I think part of it is being stubborn and saying this is what I said I wanted to do. I wanted to be a good teacher in the city. And then I guess I still feel like I'm an impactful teacher. Yeah, so I guess that, the kids, having a resident has been helpful for sure. Those are the two biggest reasons.

Interviewer: So you think that being able to serve as a coach is a factor that leads you to continuing in this job?

Julia: I'm sure. Yeah. I think especially this year. And I guess, one because of that community. Because sometimes it's easy to become frustrated, and yeah, the support from the program director, the support from having the residents...One of the biggest benefits is collaboration. I've been pretty much teaching in a silo. We have a smaller department, and I was just teaching my two courses. I didn't really collaborate with other teachers, especially last year. We had another first year teacher in our department, and we collaborated all the time. I give all the credit to my resident and the new teacher. I think they were the ones who really wanted to seek each other out, and as a result, I was able to grow and learn their ideas, and it was truly awesome to see what collaboration can really look like. We always hear that as a buzz word, but I actually was able to experience it in practice. And I love that collaborative nature, and I think that's another

reason that keeps me here...I think I value this supportive network more than any other community I've been a part of...Honestly, also the stipend, that helps...I'm just buying my first house with my husband, and I would say that's a result of both the residency program and my second job. I wouldn't have been able to do that on my salary. So I appreciate that. And it's also nice to feel like a professional. I think we often don't, and the residency program creates that opportunity, and I value that.

Julia is still teaching at Vista High School, although she is uncertain of her future as a classroom teacher. She said, "I think I can see myself teaching for another few years, but I could not say that I'm going to be teaching for five more years." She is considering switching to a non-classroom teaching position which will allow her to leave school earlier, but also shared, "I don't want to be an administrator, but if I worked with supporting teachers, I would love to see something like that."

**Liam.** Liam described his work environment as being "characterized by low teacher morale, high turnover rates, and substantial violence between students" when he first began teaching at Gable High School. He has had several principals, and explained that the student demographics have changed during his years at the school, with a "burgeoning Latinx population." When asked why he chose to not leave during his novice stage, Liam responded:

Oh, I probably would have if I had wanted to. I just didn't want to leave. I had become really committed to teaching. I felt like there was a chance I could be really good at teaching. I had a girlfriend but didn't have kids or a mortgage and felt like I was making enough money to not only survive, but to save some money and also do stuff that I like to do. So that was nice. You know, I was young...So there's probably a bunch of reasons. There's a group of teachers here who became like my best friends. That was very

important. Again, for some reason administrators ended up trusting me, not just in the building, but downtown, so eventually I'm getting to participate in a variety of ways in the school community, contributing to the development of professional knowledge, the proliferation of professional knowledge, and putting those things into practice as well.

And so this was very fulfilling for me. I still love teaching a lot. I'm more excited about teaching now than I ever have been, and that's been consistent. I just think I've been very lucky. I think there's just been a number of variables that have helped buoy me amidst all of the other things that people struggle to keep their heads above water amidst.

Although he expressed a love of teaching, Liam decided to leave his job at the end of the school year to attend graduate school with an aim of working with pre-service teachers. He shared what he will miss:

All of it. Camaraderie with other teachers. Relationships with students most of all. The daily grind. I love my schedule right now. I like waking up early. I like being at school every day. I like the variety of interactions that I have every day. I interact with so many different kinds of people, in the form of students, and also teachers, and administrators, and parents. I get to think creatively to try to solve a million different problems all the time. And yeah, I'll miss all of that.

**Mark.** Having been teaching for nine years at Anderson High School, Mark has established himself as a leader in his building. However, as discussed in research question 1, he did not always feel a sense of competence in his work as a classroom teacher. When asked if he thought about leaving, particularly when the job was most challenging for him, he responded, "Yeah, maybe in my first six months or so, but after that, no." During his interview, he reflected on his continued decision to remain and the career experiences that influence that decision:

City Public Schools is just a really challenging, stressful place to be sometimes...City Public Schools in particular is challenging just because of the sheer amount of stuff that kids are dealing with, and oftentimes it's stuff that as adults in school buildings, we don't have the ability to really address...Teaching in and of itself can be a very isolating experience if you're not surrounded by a lot of like-minded colleagues who you can connect with on both a professional and personal basis...I think one of the reasons I'm still here at Anderson High is because of my fellow teachers. I love the kids here, but I'm nine years in. If I hadn't made some really, really good friendships with the faculty and the staff, I probably would have taken an opportunity elsewhere by now. You'd have to offer me something substantial, and even if it was a cushy job, I feel like I'd have a really hard time leaving the people in this building the way it stands right now.

Interviewer: Do you think being a coach has played a role in your decision to stay each year?

Mark: Yeah. It has. At this point, I have zero interest in becoming a principal or going into administration. I just don't want that role. And I enjoy teaching. But it also feels good to feel like I'm making some progress in my career and not just flatlining in a sense. This has just given me the avenue to feel like that.

Interviewer: Where do you see yourself in five years?

Mark: I think I still see myself teaching. I was just working on master schedule stuff yesterday and looking at what it looks like two and three years out, and my name is still on the schedule. I really like it here, and I do feel confident about what we're building. I see room for growth, and I'm excited to see how I can play a role in facilitating that. I'm under no illusions that I'm doing my job perfectly right now.

**Ned.** In his interview, Ned shared his experiences of his teaching career at Anderson High School. He described challenges he faced, and how he made the decision to continue:

There were a lot of days that I almost quit. I was like if it is this bad again tomorrow, I'm not coming back again the next day, like on the verge...It was really, I think, my department that kept me here. For a number of years, probably about four years or so, I kept saying over and over again, I don't know how many years I have left in City Public Schools before I just can't take it anymore.

Interviewer: What were the things that were leading you to contemplate leaving?

Ned: The principal, honestly...You never knew on a given day what she was going to choose to care about. You never knew if she had your back or whether she was going to throw you under the bus if a parent called up irate about something or other. And faculty meetings every single week would go from 3:00 until after 4:30 of her just shouting at us about all the things that we were doing wrong, about people coming in late, people doing this, and people doing that...And there were a couple of times when it was so nasty that Mark would bring us, after the meeting, our department would get together, and we'd huddle about like that just happened, let's talk about how we're feeling...And it was just toxic for years. After our new principal came, night and day. He's very imperfect, but he just has a calming presence on the building...Now this is a really good place to be.

Interviewer: So you persevered and stayed even though you thought many times about leaving because you had a community here. Are there other things that kept you?

Ned: I'm not sure exactly because it's not a real rational process. I'm not sure exactly what weighting all of these factors had. But there were some students that you really connect with, and that keeps you here. Feeling like in some sense there's some inertia

there because I didn't want to move to a new district and then be a first year teacher all over again and learn a whole new system and whatever. My practice has evolved to fit this room and this building...I do the things I do because of the resources that I have...So there's some inertia there, you know, like I'm only going to leave if it's bad because I'm comfortable here with what I have. I don't know how important any of those factors are, but honestly the thing that kept me from applying anywhere, from looking at the job boards and applying anywhere was I didn't want to disappoint my friends, these people that have said that they are in it for the long haul and who talk about City Public Schools as their calling in life. I didn't want to disappoint them.

Ned shared that although he loved his job as a classroom teacher, he was leaving at the end of the year. He explained that he and his family were moving "not because we want to get away, but because we want to be near our family." He intends to become a classroom teacher in an urban school district in his new state, which is very similar to City Public Schools. He said, "I just feel like I've got a skillset, so let me get in there and figure out their power structures. It might be fun."

**Robin.** Although she did spend the first five years of her teaching career at a different location in City Public Schools, since becoming a licensed teacher, Robin has worked at Skyline High School. She shared that she stays because of her students and the relationships she has formed with them. However, she would like to see greater compensation for teachers:

Why am I still here? I do not know. I really, I mean I think because I like the kids...I know my kids personally...I think that's why I stay, because of the relationship I have with my kids. Do I need to make more money? Of course I do. I've got to pay these student loans. But it's the kids...I always say to myself if I leave, who's going to do it?

Because there's teachers in here, and they're like I don't know anything about them, but my kids, I could tell you who they live with, what they're doing, if they work. I can tell you all my kids. So I know everything about all of them, and they always, people say how do you do that? I've always had the ability to do that, just know them and know what's going on with them. So I think that's why I stay. They need to give us more money.

**Thomas.** As previously discussed in the findings of research question 1, Thomas struggled with feeling a sense of competence during the novice stage of his teaching career. He described his school climate as being “not the worst, and not the best,” and explained that “the administration had some issues, and I think the administrative issues were recognized by both the students and the teachers, and it was causing some problems.” The following interview excerpt highlights Thomas's career decisions and the experiences that influenced those:

Interviewer: Did you at any point during those first three years think about leaving?

Thomas: Yeah, I thought about leaving. Part of it was frustration with administration. Part of it was frustration at my own what I felt like failures to really make meaningful gains in the classroom, if that makes any sense. You know, I felt like I was just working to tread water rather than pushing ahead and swimming. That, and I had other job opportunities that paid just as much, and I clearly had come from outside the field, having been paid equally as much, and I said to myself well, that was a lot less work doing the things I used to do. So why would I do this, which is more work for the same amount or less money? So all those things factored in, and yet somehow I'm still here.

Interviewer: What do you attribute that decision to?



Thomas: Stupidity. Stubbornness. I don't know. I think I attribute that to, I had good faculty members that I worked with here and a very strong team that I had here at this school of other teachers. I think that probably is it. The culture of teachers was good. At least the ones I worked directly with. And I think that helped significantly. That's probably the major thing. That and I also wanted to see was this just a fluke. I was like am I just messing this up because I don't know anything yet, and if I give it more time, will I know something? Those were the two.

Interviewer: Do you think that being a coach has contributed at all to your decision to keep teaching?

Thomas: That's a really good question. I don't know. I really don't know. Maybe. You know, I really enjoyed it. It did actually. I take that back. It did. During that year I had a crisis of conscience and was just like maybe the way that I've been teaching is not good enough. Maybe I shouldn't have been teaching. Then I thought well maybe I should take some of the things that I've learned working with this guy over the year, and I should apply those to my teaching over the next couple of years and see how it pans out. Which is why I didn't come back as a coach the next year is because I wanted to see ok did I learn something, and will it improve or hinder my teaching practice? So yeah, it did I guess.

### **Leave Factors**

As presented in the vignettes above, several of the participants have considered leaving the profession, whether in the novice or second stage of the career. Although each person has their own career experiences which influence their career decisions, there are some factors that are found to contribute to multiple participants' contemplation of leaving the profession. These

leave factors included workplace challenges, feeling a lack of competence, and experiencing a lack of professionalism. Another leave factor shared by some of the participants is the idea of there being a time limit on the teaching career.

**Workplace challenges.** One of the factors influencing teachers' contemplation of leaving the profession is challenges in the workplace. These challenges were often centered on the school's administrator. Workplace challenges were the reason given by both Gina and Jake for why they chose to leave the first schools at which they worked in City Public Schools. Gina explained that she felt overwhelmed by her work environment, saying, "Just the stress and the constant instability, not really knowing what was going to happen during the day." Similarly, Ned, who only considered leaving but did not actually do so, explained that there was a level of uncertainty in his school stemming from the principal. He said, "You never knew on a given day what she was going to choose to care about." Jake and Thomas were also both frustrated with the way their administrators ran their schools. Thomas explained his reason for considering leaving his job. He said, "Part of it was frustration with administration."

**Lack of competence.** In addition to frustration with administration and general challenges in the workplace, Thomas and others felt a lack of competence in the beginning of their teaching career, which influenced their career decisions. The notion that most of the teachers experienced a lack of competence early in the teaching career was presented in the findings for research question 1. In the vignettes above, this idea comes up again as an experience teachers had, which influenced their thoughts of leaving the profession. For example, Catherine was on the brink of quitting her job after routinely crying over the phone to her husband because she felt like she was unable to be an effective teacher. Kelly and Mark also experienced a lack of competence which led them to briefly consider leaving, Mark early on in

his career, and Kelly at the beginning of her second stage. Kelly shared that during her fourth year, she “had a really rough class. And I never really wanted to leave, but it was just a constant thing that popped up in the back of my head.” Mark shared that his thoughts of leaving due to a lack of competence only happened during his “first six months or so.”

**Lack of professionalism.** Another leave factor in the vignettes above that several of the participants shared is the experience of a lack of professionalism in their teaching careers. The idea of professionalism appeared throughout the data when participants described their workload, feeling respected, their salary and benefits, and having work-life balance. Diana, Susan, Jake, and Julia all shared their experiences of a lack of professionalism in their teaching careers, which led them to consider leaving. In three of these cases, Diana, Susan, and Jake, the participants did end up leaving City Public Schools. Diana stated, “With everything we have to do here, and then you have to leave here and get a second job, that’s crazy.” Julia also spoke of having to have a second job. She explained, “I still work a part time job. I’ve been working a part time job since I started teaching.” Although he did not mention a second job, Jake also spoke of the amount of money he makes as a classroom teacher and how he cannot justify spending the amount of time he does on his job without feeling appropriately compensated. Although she did speak of having a second job during her interview, the lack of professionalism leave factor for Susan was feeling “undervalued, underappreciated, and not respected.”

**Time Limit.** One final leave factor presented in the vignettes by multiple participants was the idea of there being a time limit to the teaching career. For example, Catherine said, “I know that there comes a point, I mean I’ve seen it with teachers, where they don’t enjoy the day to day conversations, and the day to day tasks, and just the business of it all.” Similarly, Elisha shared that she believes “there’s a time limit to how effective you can be.” Gina, Diana, and

Jake all shared similar sentiments, explaining that they do not think it is possible for them to be a classroom teacher until retirement; they envision themselves leaving the profession before that point.

### **Stay Factors**

Although many of the participants shared thoughts of leaving the career at one point or another, they did explain how they have made the decision to stay throughout their careers. Many of the participants stated that their students play a role in their decision to continue teaching. Other stay factors include relationships with colleagues, a desire to continue developing teaching competencies, acceptance of what is or is not within the teacher's control, and being a coach.

**Students.** Several of the teachers in this study stated that they stay in their teaching careers because of the students they teach. Some participants, like Joseph and Julia, simply expressed their love of the students. Others provided greater detail about why the students are a stay factor for them. For instance, Robin shared, "I know everything about all of them...I've always had the ability to do that, just know them and know what's going on with them. So I think that's why I stay." Elisha explained, "With leadership changing so much, I felt a responsibility to still be here for our students because they kept seeing so much change." Gina, Danielle, and Diana also shared that the students were a reason for them to stay.

**Colleagues.** Having positive and supportive relationships with colleagues was an experience that influenced many participants' career decisions. Kelly and Susan each shared how their relationship with one another was a reason they continue teaching. When sharing why he chose to stay when he was thinking about leaving, Thomas explained, "I had good faculty members that I worked with here and a very strong team that I had here at this school of other

teachers...I think that helped significantly.” Ned and Mark also both shared how their relationships with their colleagues influence their decision to continue teaching. Both shared how they did not want to leave because they felt that to do so would be letting their colleagues down. Mark explained, “If I hadn’t made some really, really good friendships with the faculty and the staff, I probably would have taken an opportunity elsewhere by now.” He then said that even if he had a great job offer, he would “feel like I’d have a really hard time leaving the people in this building the way it stands right now.” Even in the midst of feeling overwhelmed and unable to effectively do his job, Ned explained why he did not look for another job elsewhere. He said, “I didn’t want to disappoint my friends these people that have said that they are in it for the long haul and who talk about City Public Schools as their calling in life. I didn’t want to disappoint them.” The experience of having good relationships with colleagues played a role in the career decisions of Ned, Mark, and several other participants.

**Competence.** While a lack of competence was a leave factor for several, the desire to continue developing teaching competence was a stay factor for some. Liam explained that while he never considered leaving his teaching job when he experienced a lack of competence early on in his career, he “felt like there was a chance I could be really good at teaching.” The desire to become a better teacher kept him engaged in the profession. Like Liam, Joseph never contemplated quitting, even when he struggled to be effective in the classroom. His drive to consistently improve his teaching practice does play a role in his decision to continue in his career. He stated, “I’m just starting to figure out what I’m doing.” Unlike Liam and Joseph, Mark briefly thought about leaving early in his career. However, his experiences in gaining competencies kept him from leaving. As a second stage teacher, this desire to continue to grow influences his decision to keep teaching. He shared, “I see room for growth, and I’m excited to

see how I can play a role in facilitating that I'm under no illusions that I'm doing my job perfectly right now."

**Acceptance.** In the vignettes presenting career experiences and decisions, three participants spoke of accepting what they can and cannot control as a stay factor. Gina explained that she tries to stay positive and not "get bogged down with a lot of the things that go on behind the scenes." After describing a work environment with numerous challenges, Danielle stated that part of why she is able to continue working at her school is because she has reached a point where she understands what is within her control. She said she has learned to "compartmentalize certain things. Some things I can't control. Some things I can." Finally, in his explanation for why he has continued teaching at his school even when he contemplated leaving, Ned explained that he has learned how to work with what resources he has and has accepted the way things are. He shared an example of how he was unable to get computers, a fact that originally frustrated him. However, he adapted his teaching style to use the resources he does have. Of the computer situation, he said, "I just abandoned that, and now I do what I do." Each of these three teachers has learned to accept the things that are out of their control and focus instead on what is within their control. These experiences have influenced their career decisions.

**Coaching.** Some of the participants shared that being a coach with the residency program is an influence on their decision to continue teaching. For Kelly, Gina, Catherine, and Julia, being a coach is a reason for them to continue teaching because they enjoy it. For example, Gina shared, "I was actually thinking of moving to the county, but I'd really like to keep doing this." Kelly also likes being a coach and said, "It's just nice to see that you were able to help somebody maybe not struggle as much as you did." The coaching experience also influences the career decisions of Mark and Susan. However, for them, coaching provides an

opportunity for career advancement. Mark stated, “It also feels good to feel like I’m making some progress in my career and not just flatlining in a sense. This has given me the avenue to feel like that.” Susan shared, “When you have your teaching degree, there’s only so much you can grow in that.” She then explained that promotions are not simply handed out to teachers, but being a coach allows her to feel as though this is a form of job promotion.

### **RQ 3 Conclusion**

Through their interviews, the participants shared professional experiences in both their work as teachers and role as coaches that influence their career decisions. The findings were presented first with vignettes sharing the voices of each of the teachers, as this was a way to highlight each individual’s unique experiences and decisions. Then, specific stay and leave factors common to multiple participants were presented. The primary reasons participants gave for continuing their careers with City Public Schools were the students and their relationships with their colleagues. Although feeling a lack of competence early on in their careers led many to contemplate leaving, fulfillment of the need for competence and a continued desire to grow as a teacher was also a reason to stay. For several of the participants, being a coach was another reason they gave for their decision to continue teaching in City Public Schools.

While the third research question asks what experiences influence their decision to stay, the teachers in this study also shared experiences that caused them to wrestle with the idea of leaving, and in some cases make the decision to leave. It was important to present this data alongside the findings of why they stay to provide the full picture of how these participants reach their career decisions. Many participants described feeling that there is a time limit to how long someone can be a classroom teacher. They are open to the idea that they will reach that point and will then leave teaching. Factors associated with a perceived lack of professionalism, such

as a mismatch between pay and workload and feeling disrespected also contributed to teachers contemplating leaving their jobs in City Public Schools. In the next chapter, the complexities of their career decisions and the relationship of the findings from each of the research questions will be discussed in addition to showing how these findings align with and extend previous research.



## **Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusions**

The previous chapter presented the findings of this study in which 15 urban second stage teacher leaders shared their experiences working in City Public Schools and serving as coaches with the Mid-Atlantic Urban Teacher Residency program. The teachers in this current study shared stories of their professional experiences from their entry into the career, through the novice phase, into their second stage and taking on the role of mentor to pre-service teachers. The previous chapter presented data and themes regarding second stage mentor teachers' experiences of fulfillment of the basic psychological needs, job satisfaction, and factors that influence their career decisions. This chapter discusses the findings presented in the previous chapter and draws connections between these findings and existing scholarly literature introduced in chapters one and two. It then discusses limitations of the study, future directions, and implications for practice.

### **Discussion of Findings**

Teacher retention is an important topic of study given the high rates of teacher turnover in the United States (Johnson, Berg, & Donaldson, 2005), particularly in urban school systems (Papay, Bacher-Hicks, Page, & Marinell, 2017). Exploring this topic, specifically with an aim to understand how teachers reach the decision to stay, is a line of research that seems both timely and meaningful. While scholars do not often take the approach of focusing on reasons for

teacher retention, opting instead to understand reasons why teachers leave (De Neve & Devos, 2017), this study does just that. Additionally, this study extends previous research by exploring teachers' basic psychological needs, a line of research not well-studied (Betoret, 2013; Evelein, Korthagen, & Brekelmans, 2008), through qualitative methods, the use of which has been called for in existing research (Vermeulen, Castelijns, Kools, & Koster, 2012). As this study's findings indicate, qualitatively exploring basic psychological needs, job satisfaction, and career decisions of urban second stage teacher leaders shows the complex interactions of these topics and how existing research may not fully capture these complexities.

Although there is not a great deal of existing research examining second stage teachers, the findings of this current study do agree with others (e.g., Bressman, Winter, & Efron, 2018; Kirkpatrick & Johnson, 2014) that there is indeed a second stage of teaching in which teachers feel a greater sense of confidence and competence than the novice stage. They are able to take on new challenges during this stage of their careers, and the participants in this study had done just that by becoming coaches with the Mid-Atlantic Urban Teacher Residency program. The findings of this study also provide evidence that it is important to study teachers in their second stage; the participants had a great deal to share regarding need fulfillment, experiences of job satisfaction, and the career decisions they make.

### **Fulfillment of Basic Psychological Needs**

Analysis of the data showed that each of the study's participants had fulfillment of the three basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Participants shared the most information about fulfillment of the needs for competence and relatedness. These two needs also seemed to be connected to one another for many of the participants. Fulfillment of the need for autonomy, while present, was discussed less often throughout the interviews.

**Competence.** Of the three basic psychological needs, competence was discussed most often. This makes sense, as being able to perform the tasks of the job and feeling effective in performing those tasks is an important factor in every job, including teaching. The majority of the participants described feeling a lack of competence at the beginning of their teaching career. However, for Danielle and Jake, this was not the case. Like Ned, Danielle and Jake completed an alternative teacher preparation program in which they were able to spend a great deal of time in a school in City Public Schools during their training. Both Danielle and Jake became teachers of record in their teacher preparation schools; this experience helped them feel a sense of competence from the beginning of the teaching career. Jake shared, “I felt pretty prepared because I was teaching the same classes I had taught in my pre-service program, in the same classroom,” and after explaining all that she knew at the beginning of her first year, Danielle said, “Even though my first year wasn’t a breeze, it was way easier.” Although Ned completed the same alternative teacher preparation program, he became a teacher of record at a different school than the one at which he had completed his pre-service training. This made his experiences more similar to those of Joseph, Julia, Elisha, and Liam, all of whom student taught in City Public Schools during their traditional teacher preparation program. He explained how challenging it was because every aspect of the job was new to him. Elisha too shared, “When I was doing my first year of teaching...I was not prepared for this experience.” These findings seem to indicate that teacher preparation does matter in terms of how prepared or competent a teacher feels when he or she first begins teaching, a factor discussed in numerous studies on teacher retention and attrition as being associated with a teacher’s decision to leave the profession (e.g., Borman & Dowling, 2008; Chapman, 1983; Reeves & Lowenhaupt, 2016).

While research often explains that a novice teacher's feelings of lack of preparation or competence push them toward leaving the profession, none of the teachers in this study let their lack of sense of competence cause them to leave the profession during their novice stage. Catherine contemplated leaving due to her lack of competence; she had no prior experience in the urban school environment, but decided to stick with it and became more competent as time went on. She shared that she was going to "figure it out and make it my goal to be good at it." Thomas gave himself time and space to see if he could begin to feel competent in his teaching position. He explained, "I was like, am I just messing this up because I don't know anything yet, and if I give it more time, will I know something?" These teachers each seemed to believe that they could become more competent in their work as teachers if they gave themselves time to do so, and that did in fact happen.

Throughout their novice stage of teaching and into their second stage, the participants described growing competence in their work, yet continuing to desire challenges and growth in their teaching practice. This finding is similar to previous research which found that second stage teachers felt more capable of doing their job than they had during the novice stage, but they wanted continual improvement and challenges in their teaching (e.g., Bressman, Winter, & Efron, 2018; Eros, 2011). Joseph explained that throughout his teaching career, he intends to continue to get better, but then shared, "It's hard to get better year after year, because after year three, you can coast. But you're going to get bored, and you're going to leave."

For some participants, taking on the role of coach with the Mid-Atlantic Urban Teacher Residency program helped them gain a fulfillment of their need for competence, whether through the act of coaching or as a by-product of having another person in the classroom. For example, Susan, Kelly, and Elisha all explained that they were able to provide more targeted instruction

and prepare more academic resources by having a resident in the classroom, and Ned and Julia also described being able to create new lessons with the assistance of their residents. In each of these instances, the increase in competence occurred through sharing the classroom teaching workload with another individual. In other instances, though, the teachers improved their teaching practice because they were mentoring a resident. Robin and Ned both shared a growing understanding of why they do what they do in teaching as they worked with their residents. Ned explained doing certain classroom management strategies and shared, “I never realized why I do it.” However, through his conversations with his resident, he learned more about the practices he implements in his own classroom teaching. He said, “I’m more metacognitive than I used to be.” Both Jake and Elisha have grown more reflective about their own teaching practices through the coaching role as well. Elisha explained that when she observes her resident, it makes her reflect on her own teaching; “It makes me a little bit more mindful about what are the students doing.” Jake also stated that even when he does not have a resident, he still uses the coaching tools in his head to think about his own teaching; “I really think about what it would look like for an observer.”

Whether simply a by-product of having another person in the classroom or because of the coaching role itself, the teachers in this study gained competencies through the teacher leadership role. Similar to the findings of Jaspers, Meijer, Prins, and Wubbels (2014), mentoring led to improved teaching practice for teachers in this study. Also similar to the findings of Gul, Kadir, and Criswell (2019), the teachers in this study experienced greater reflection on their own teaching practices because of their coaching role. In most instances, competence was not developed in isolation. As coaches, working with the residents helped the teachers become more

competent in their work as classroom teachers. Colleagues too provided the necessary support to help the teachers in this study find their footing in the teaching profession.

**Relatedness.** Findings of existing research on second stage teachers show that teachers in this stage of their career desire professional collegiality, or relationships with their colleagues (e.g., Charner-Laird, 2007; Szczisiul, 2007). The current study is no different. The relationships developed with colleagues seem to be the most important aspect of the career to several of the participants, which is in line with findings of Stanford's (2001) study of second stage urban elementary teachers. For example, Susan and Kelly both shared that their friendship and knowing they would be able to see each other is why they have continued working for City Public Schools as long as they have. They even requested to be interviewed together because they have such a close relationship. Mark and Ned also felt very strongly about the importance of relatedness. They described a challenging work environment, complete with faculty meetings filled with yelling and blame-casting. Their friendships, along with others at their school, sustained them during those difficult times. As Ned explained, they created a group of teachers that would "go out socially outside of school" and be a support network for one another.

Professional relationships do not only happen through the job of teaching; they can also be developed through the leadership roles teachers take on. According to Molitor, Parker, and Vetter (2018), one of the benefits of being a mentor teacher is becoming part of a professional community. Mentoring allows the teacher to connect not only with the pre-service teacher, but with others who are also serving in the mentor role. This can help fulfill a teacher's need for relatedness. In this current study, being a coach with the teacher residency program allowed many of the participants to develop a professional network and fulfill their need for relatedness.

In their quantitative study of teachers' basic psychological needs, Klassen, Perry, and Frenzel (2012) found that relatedness, particularly relatedness with students, was important to the well-being of teachers. The findings of this current study somewhat support that. Klassen and colleagues (2012) explained fulfillment of relatedness with students as being driven by teachers' desire to work with students and then developing positive relationships with them. While several participants in the current study mentioned remaining in the profession for their students, and Robin explained the strong relationships she has with her students, relatedness with colleagues seemed to be much more important for this group of teachers. Perhaps the findings of the current study align more with those of two previous studies (i.e., Aldrup, Klusmann, & Ludtke, 2017; Collie, Shapka, Perry, & Martin, 2016) which found that relatedness with students seemed to be more important for early career teachers rather than those in their second stage. While the students are important to this study's participants, it is feeling connected to colleagues which fulfills the need for relatedness.

**Autonomy.** Similar to previous research on teachers' basic psychological needs, autonomy seemed to be the least important of the three needs for teachers in this study (e.g., Hobson & Maxwell, 2017). The participants acknowledged that they have a sense of autonomy and are able to create their own lessons and teach in whatever way works for their students. In some instances, such as the experiences described by Jake and Catherine, their administrators support their autonomy by allowing them to make decisions that affect their engagement with their work. Jake recounted his experience of not wanting to go to a City Public Schools event for teachers and being told by his principal "you shouldn't do anything you don't feel comfortable doing." Catherine explained that her principal is "really on board" with teachers looping up with

their students “if it’s something you want to do.” Others also shared that they feel they have been given the freedom to make decisions for themselves in their teaching career.

However, some of the participants did describe policies, such as standardized testing and pacing guides, that restrict their autonomy. For many, these policies did not bother them. This might be due to the fact that the policies have been in place throughout the duration of their teaching career, an idea also shared by Szczesiul (2007). Some, however, talked about how policies hindered their instruction. In these cases, although they were not granted autonomy by the district, they took it for themselves. For example, Ned shared that he “never once, not once, followed the district pacing guide.” Similarly, Joseph explained that at the beginning of his teaching career, he “didn’t teach to the benchmark” tests. Elisha also described a district-wide mandate with which she chose to not comply, opting instead to take the time, “using it effectively and doing something that directly benefits my students’ needs.” In each of these cases, the participants made the decision to grant themselves autonomy, in spite of what district-level leaders told them to do, and they did so because they felt their decisions were in the best interest of their students.

One other experience of autonomy participants described was feeling that there was too much granted to teachers, which aligns with Kirkpatrick’s (2007) study of second stage teachers. This was mainly seen in a lack of meaningful feedback. For example, Danielle shared that there was no oversight on lesson planning or instructional delivery, which meant that “people teach wrong the whole year” without ever being guided to make improvements. Thomas also shared that at the beginning of his teaching career, there was “no oversight,” which provided him with complete freedom in his classroom. However, that occurred at a time in which he was struggling to feel competent and could likely have used feedback to improve his practice. Elisha and Mark



both explained that they did receive feedback, however it was not helpful, so they too felt like they had been given too much freedom in determining how best to teach. While autonomy is an important need that teachers have, and each of these teachers experienced it, perhaps there are times in a teacher's career in which more or less autonomy is warranted. Like training wheels on a bike for someone who is learning how to ride one, more oversight from the principal during the novice stage of teaching may expedite teachers' mastery of the craft.

### **Job Satisfaction**

Throughout the interviews, the participants shared ways in which they felt a sense of job satisfaction or even dissatisfaction. Overall, the teachers in this study do feel a sense of job satisfaction. They reported liking what they do when it came to being a classroom teacher and enjoyed working with the students and crafting lessons to teach them. The components of the job that they love align with Kirkpatrick's (2007) finding that second stage teachers enjoy the "teaching part of teaching" (p. 10). Some felt a sense of job satisfaction because they were able to work with students that in Diana's words "needed what I was providing" because of the community context in which many of the students came from. Others like Liam, Gina, and Julia enjoyed the challenging aspects of the job and the ways in which it made them more engaged in the work. For example, Liam explained, "I get to think creatively to try to solve a million different problems all the time."

A few participants also shared specific sources of dissatisfaction. Gina and Diana both described working within policy contexts that made their jobs more challenging. Gina stated that while she loves being in the classroom, "I don't really like the bureaucracy of education." Diana's dissatisfaction stemmed from feeling as though she does not have time to actually teach because she is busy following the policies and procedures that are required. In each of these

instances, the policy context in which they work might not allow Gina nor Diana to grant themselves autonomy as was previously discussed in terms of the decisions of Ned, Joseph, and Elisha. Danielle's source of dissatisfaction was working in a negative climate. In her case, a change in school leadership and subsequent changes in staffing caused teachers to lose the sense of relatedness they had. As existing research indicates, in these instances, job satisfaction does seem to be connected to fulfillment of teachers' basic psychological needs (Ryan & Deci, 2001; Van den Broeck, Ferris, Chang, & Rosen, 2016).

Existing literature about teacher mentoring describes it as being a leadership role that may increase job satisfaction for teachers (Arnett, 2017) and may allow teachers to rekindle their excitement for teaching (Darling-Hammond, 2003). Both of these ideas were present in the findings of the current study. Many of the participants in this study shared that they enjoyed being a coach, and some explained that this enjoyment comes from the professional community of coaches, which aligns with previous research (Molitor, Parker, & Vetter, 2018). For Robin, being with the professional community provided her with what she needed to rekindle her love of teaching. She stated, "I'm getting some adult time to say this is why you're here, and it rejuvenates you for the next year." Similar sentiments were shared by Susan, Kelly, and Catherine. It could be true that the teachers in this study would derive similar satisfaction from participation in another form of leadership that also provided a way for them to build a professional network. It seems that the professional network component of their work as coaches, along with their new and increased competencies, are what provides them with the greatest sense of satisfaction. Given this, it seems that fulfillment of their needs for competence and relatedness contribute to feelings of satisfaction in their coaching role, and for many, this

played a part in how they reached decisions about their careers, as will be discussed in the next section.

## **Career Decisions**

The question *Why do they stay?* is at the heart of this research study on urban second stage teacher leaders. Existing scholarly work describes the second stage of teaching as being one of contemplating career decisions and determining whether or not to continue in the profession (e.g., Bressman, Winter, & Efron, 2018; Doan & Peters, 2009; Donaldson, 2005; Huberman, 1989). My findings support this notion. It is within the findings showing how their experiences in their teaching career and role as a coach influence their career decisions that the previous two sections of findings, basic psychological need fulfillment and job satisfaction, really come to life. One of the challenges with this study was breaking apart the data to present the findings and discussion of each research question. Throughout the data collection and analysis, I realized how complex the question actually is for each individual. Data presented from one of the vignettes speaks to this. Ned shared that he had thought about leaving his teaching position on a daily basis, yet stayed because of the sense of relatedness he felt with his colleagues, including Mark. When asked if there were other things that kept him, he replied, “I’m not exactly sure because it’s not a real rational process. I’m not sure exactly what weighting all of these factors had.” Regardless of the weighting, fulfillment of the basic psychological needs and job satisfaction do seem to play a role in the career decisions of teachers in this study, along with the desire for professionalism and in some instances, a commitment to the students they teach.

**Need Fulfillment.** As previously discussed, the three needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness seem to be important to each of the teachers in this study, each to a varying

degree. One of the primary reasons some of the teachers contemplated leaving early on in the teaching career was a lack of competence. The teachers described not feeling prepared for what they faced, whether because being a teacher of record was very different from their pre-service experience, or because they were unprepared for the challenges they faced in the urban school environment. Whipp & Geronime (2017) explain that when an individual has student teaching or prior work experience in an urban school, that individual is more likely to continue teaching in an urban school; this is most likely due to the fact that their prior experiences allowed them to develop necessary competencies for teaching in the urban setting. In the current study, several participants had prior work or student teaching experience in an urban school. Danielle, Jake, and Ned all completed an alternative teacher preparation program that enabled them to spend a great deal of time in City Public Schools, learning to teach through experiences in the classroom. Elisha, Julia, Joseph, and Liam all completed their student teaching experiences in City Public Schools, and Thomas had previously worked in two schools in the district before becoming a teacher. Although these experiences in some ways prepared them for their jobs, they did not immunize them against thoughts or decisions of leaving. Danielle and Jake were the only individuals in the study who shared feeling competent from the beginning of their teaching career. This is most likely due to the fact that they stayed in the same school from pre-service preparation through their initial years as a teacher. Although Ned completed the same alternative preparation program, he transitioned to a different school to become a teacher. He did not have fulfillment of his need for competence during his novice stage and contemplated leaving throughout this time period. This suggests that preparation does matter, and finding ways to prepare pre-service teachers in the schools in which they will become teachers may help them begin the career on more solid ground.

While Liam, Elisha, Julia, Joseph, and Thomas also had experiences in City Public Schools prior to becoming teachers, none of them felt a fulfillment of the need for competence at the beginning of their career. Their experiences prior to becoming a teacher had been at different locations, and none were in the same position as Danielle, Jake, and Ned in which they were able to spend an extended period of time learning how to teach through being in the schools. Although these teachers, and almost every other participant in the study, shared not feeling competent throughout the novice stage of their career, they persevered and began to feel more effective in their teaching practice as they moved toward the second stage of teaching. Although many participants discussed thoughts of leaving during their second stage, it is worth noting that none of them were contemplating this due to a lack of competence. Even when they shared the belief that they still had room for growth in their teaching practice, they felt as though they were effective in the classroom. For this particular group of teachers, this makes sense. They were selected to serve as coaches because of being skilled in the art of teaching.

One of the means through which they were able to grow more competent was through their relationships with their colleagues. Fulfillment of the need for relatedness played a big role not only in the growth in their competence but also in their decisions to stay. Many of the participants described working with other teachers who provided support for them, whether through helping them with lesson plans, materials, and strategies, or simply giving them space to work on their own practice without being hindered by paperwork. It seems as though without feeling connected to their colleagues, the teachers would have not received the support they did to become more effective in their instruction.

Relatedness with colleagues continued to play a role in the teachers' career decisions throughout their second stage of teaching. Susan and Kelly both explained that their friendship

was a primary reason for continuing to teach in City Public Schools. Ned and Mark also shared how their friendships with their colleagues played a big role in their decision to continue teaching. Mark explained, “I’d have a really hard time leaving the people in this building the way it stands now,” and Ned shared that in all the times he thought about leaving, “my department kept me here.”

Existing literature states that students are a primary reason teachers provide for deciding to continue in the profession (e.g., Battle & Looney, 2014; Bennett, Brown, Kirby-Smith, & Severson, 2013; Brunetti, 2006; Perrachione, Petersen, & Rosser, 2008; Stanford, 2001). Likewise, this was a reason given by many participants in this study as to why they continue teaching. Although their mentions of students did not necessarily show the same depth of relatedness as with colleagues, the students did factor in to their career decisions. Even though she was wrestling with the idea of continuing in the profession, Elisha explained that the students are what keep her coming back. She shared, “I genuinely like these kids, and families, and their personalities, and just all that they bring to school every day.” Joseph also explained that he continues teaching because of his students. Robin was one of the few participants who elaborated on how the students keep her in the profession. She shared that she has a relationship with her students. She explained, “I think that’s why I stay, because of the relationship I have with my kids.” She talked about knowing all of her students, which is something she believes her colleagues do not necessarily do.

Although the need for autonomy seemed to be fulfilled for each of the study’s participants, it was not necessarily a primary factor in anyone’s career decisions. While not a primary reason, Diana did mention the testing of students when she was explaining experiences that have led her to question her longevity in the career. She also described a lack of

advancement opportunities and low pay in the teaching profession as reasons why she was contemplating leaving. While standardized testing policies may thwart her autonomy, the other reasons, advancement and pay, do not fall under the umbrella of autonomy, and perhaps speak to a need for professionalism.

**Job Satisfaction.** For the most part, the participants in this study expressed feeling enjoyment or satisfaction from the work they do as teachers. This is largely related to the “teaching part of teaching” (Kirkpatrick, 2007, p. 10). This sense of job satisfaction stemming from the role of classroom teacher seems to be mostly associated with fulfillment of the need for competence. The teachers are able to effectively deliver instruction and feel a sense of confidence in finding solutions to classroom challenges. Fulfillment of the need for relatedness is also connected to the participants’ sense of job satisfaction. They enjoy both their work as a classroom teacher and leadership role as a coach in part because of the relationships that they have formed. Although all of the teachers seemed to have each of the three basic psychological needs fulfilled during their second stage of teaching, and shared that they felt at least some sense of job satisfaction, this did not lead to all teachers making the decision to remain in the profession indefinitely. In fact, many of the teachers talked about looking for other jobs or believing that there was a finite amount of time teachers could keep teaching. From this finding, there seems to be something that sets teaching apart from other professions when it comes to applying the theory of basic psychological needs and its relation to job satisfaction and ultimately career decisions.

**Professionalism, the Missing Need.** The participants in this study all seem to have fulfillment of their three basic psychological needs. Additionally, all of them shared that they enjoy their work, at least to a certain extent. However, they still had sources of dissatisfaction,

stemming largely from what I have referred to as experiences of a lack of professionalism. The idea of professionalism contains topics such as being treated with respect, workload, pay, benefits, training, opportunities for advancement, and work conditions. These are the push and pull factors described by Yonezawa, Jones, and Singer (2011), which cause teachers to leave their jobs. The push of dissatisfying work conditions in one's current place or the pull of the promise of more satisfying work conditions elsewhere is linked to teachers' decisions to leave the profession. Through this study, it seems as if these factors are simply part of a need teachers have, the need for professionalism. Meeting this need can contribute to their sense of job satisfaction, just as meeting the needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness does.

One example of this need for professionalism is seen when the participants, Jake and Julia in particular, talk about the workload they have and the pay they receive for doing their job. Jake, who had left his previous school because of issues with school leadership that seemed to thwart his need for professionalism, described contemplating leaving the teaching profession. He explained, "I yearn for a job that I don't take, that isn't on my mind...Money's not everything, but if this job was compensated double the amount that it was, I wouldn't mind taking it home." Julia shared that she wanted to start a family but explained, "I still work a part time job. I've been working a part time job since I started teaching." Julia went on to share that she is thinking of other possibilities for her career. She asked, "How can I still be involved in the school, but be able to leave at four o'clock?" The ideas expressed by these two participants are also found in existing literature. Pay plays a role in teachers' career decisions, and research indicates that teachers may be willing to continue to do more work if they feel compensated for the work they do (e.g., Darling-Hammond, 2003; Hanushek, Kain, & Rivkin, 2004). Along the lines of Julia desiring a reduced workload, one that does not need to extend past four o'clock,



Gina shared that part of why she is still a teacher with City Public Schools is because she has work-life balance. She stated, “I think having that separation of home life and work life is really key...When you don’t have that balance, that’s really when you burn out.” She made the decision to not work beyond her contract hours each day, an exercise in autonomy that her principal was in favor of.

For some participants, being a coach helped fulfill their need for professionalism, which aligns with previous scholarly work. York-Barr and Duke (2004) explain that one of the reasons a movement toward teacher leadership began is to help increase the professionalism for teachers. Additionally, they, along with Brill and McCartney (2008), explain that one way to create greater professionalism in the teaching career is through leadership opportunities, such as mentoring. Professionalism through these teacher leadership opportunities may come through collaboration with others and feeling as though there is a career ladder in place (Berry, 2019). Many teachers spoke of the professionalism they experienced through being a coach and how much they enjoyed this. After stating “we literally pay for our promotions,” Susan explained that being a coach is a reason she has been teaching in City Public Schools for as long as she has. She explained, “Doing stuff like [coaching], that’s our opportunity to grow within our building...I think that if I didn’t do this program, I might have been burnt out before now.” Catherine too shared she has enjoyed the professionalism she feels through being a coach. She stated, “I get this extra little bit of professionalism helping this new young teacher hopefully have the same passion that I have.”

**Generational Differences.** One of the ideas that appeared in the literature was that there might be generational differences at play, with the current generation of teachers being less inclined than their predecessors to envision classroom teaching as the only career they will

possess (Margolis, 2008). This does seem to be true for several participants in this study. Diana explained in her interview that “it’s no longer feasible, in my opinion, for teachers to be in this career 30 odd years anymore,” Jake said, “I never really envisioned myself being a teacher for 30 years,” and Julia asked the question, “Is this really sustainable?” Others too shared that they believe being a classroom teacher has an expiration date at which point a teacher becomes burnt out, frustrated, or simply can no longer do the job. Elisha said, “I think there’s a time limit for how effective you can be.” The word yet was used by many of the participants, including Gina, Susan, and Kelly, when they talked about teacher burnout and anticipating reaching that point in their career. This shows that while they are still invested in the career at the moment, they believe it is inevitable that they will reach a point where they can no longer work as classroom teachers. Catherine too spoke of reaching a point where teaching is no longer enjoyable and said, “I don’t know when, I’m not there now, but I’m very open to the fact that that might happen.”

Many also spoke of opportunities for advancement, which are virtually non-existent in the teaching career; advancement in public education as it stands today generally means becoming a school administrator, a notion about which several participants expressed disdain. In their study of teacher leadership, Reeves and Lowenhaupt (2016) explain that teaching is a career without much upward mobility. Several of the participants in the current study discussed this. Susan stated, “When you have your teaching degree, there’s only so much you can grow in that. It’s not like you can get a raise or a promotion.” She and Kelly both shared that they had gone to graduate school while working as teachers to obtain degrees that will allow them to transition from the classroom to other positions in education. Mark also noted that teaching is a career without opportunities for advancement. He sees his role as a coach as providing this and said, “It

also feels good to feel like I'm making some progress in my career and not just flatlining in a sense. This has given me the avenue to feel like that." Serving as a coach has given both Elisha and Julia ideas about what they could do beyond classroom teaching that will allow them to still be in the field of education. Julia explained that she does not see herself continuing to teach beyond five years. She said, "I don't want to be an administrator, but if I worked with supporting teachers, I would love to see something like that." This is similar to a finding of Charner-Laird's (2007) study on second stage teachers in which their experiences helped them see ways in which they can still be a part of education, yet transition from the classroom. Perhaps these generational differences and the desire to transition from classroom teaching to other roles is a component of the need for professionalism.

While there do seem to be generational differences at play, with most of the participants not seeing classroom teaching as a career one has until retirement, one of the participants does not have any plans to leave the classroom in the immediate or long-term future. Joseph is "trying to leave a mark" and intends to be in the classroom for his entire career. While the teaching career as it stands today seems to be a good fit for Joseph and others like him who want to continue to improve their craft and retire from classroom teaching, for others, it is simply a matter of time until they move into other positions outside of the classroom.

### **Revised Conceptual Model**

Understanding teachers' career decisions and attempting to answer the question of why they stay in their urban teaching positions was the center of this study. As the findings show, particularly through the vignettes for each participant, this is not an easy question to answer. Nor is it one that has the same answer for each participant. I came into this study expecting to find that these teachers experienced fulfillment of their three basic psychological needs through the

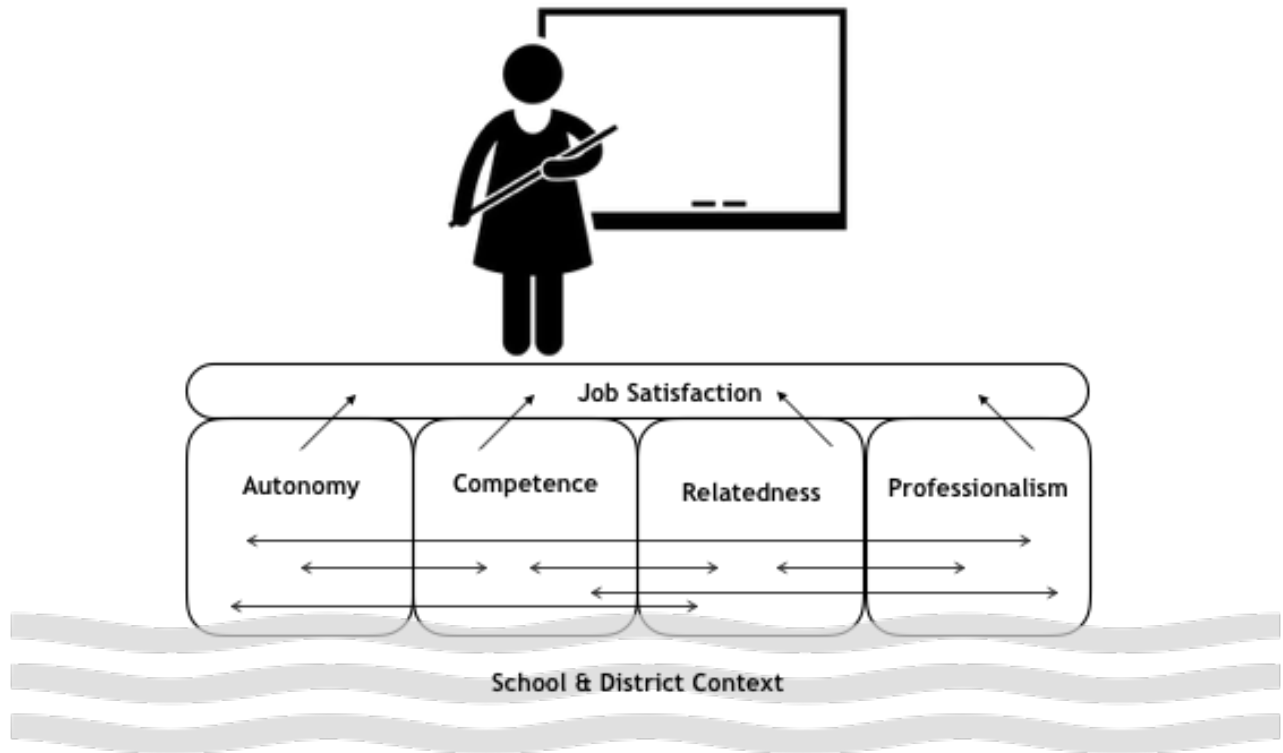
combination of work as a classroom teacher and role as a coach. I also expected that this need fulfillment would make them feel satisfied in their jobs and not be affected by the push and pull factors (Yonezawa, Jones, & Singer, 2011) that cause so many teachers, particularly urban teachers, to leave. What I found, however, was that this is not the case. The teachers did all share that they had fulfillment of the needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, and many shared that they liked or even loved their jobs. However, this was not enough. At the same time they said they loved their jobs, they talked about the career lacking a sense of professionalism, which contributed to a sense of dissatisfaction. Although in some instances they were able to experience this through coaching, the lack of professionalism in their work as classroom teachers still negatively influenced their job outlook. Given the findings of this study, I see professionalism as a need experienced by teachers, on par with the three basic psychological needs, which then also influences their sense of job satisfaction.

While I started this study with certain ideas from existing literature (see Figure 1), I began to understand that the data was telling a slightly different story, and the model did not fully explain the experiences of the participants in this study. The original model showed need fulfillment and job satisfaction as a buffer that insulated the teacher from the push and pull factors discussed by Yonezawa, Jones, and Singer (2011). However, even when they shared fulfillment of their needs and experiencing a sense of job satisfaction, so many of them still described wrestling with the decision to stay or leave. This led me to believe the idea of need fulfillment and job satisfaction as a buffer was incorrect for this group of teachers.

I was also struck during Liam's interview when he described what kept him in his job amidst numerous contextual challenges. He said, "I think there's just been a number of variables that have helped buoy me amidst all of the other things that people struggle to keep their heads

above water amidst.” This led me to think about the teacher being on a raft within the sea of the school and district contexts. Job satisfaction still helps them stay afloat; without a sense of enjoyment for the job of teaching, they would find other work to do. The findings of this study do seem to indicate that autonomy, competence, and relatedness play a role in how satisfied a teacher is with his or her job. There is another need that teachers in this study seem to have, the need for professionalism. Together, these components may have the potential to buoy a teacher amidst contextual challenges and keep him or her engaged in the job. While each of the components is important to every participant in this study, how much each matters varies from individual to individual. When one part of the raft is missing, depending on the context and how much bearing that component has on an individual teacher’s satisfaction, the teacher might begin to feel like he or she is drowning and might look for other employment opportunities that hold the promise of fulfilling the missing needs.

Figure 2 depicts the new conceptual model. Although this model represents each of the four needs (autonomy, competence, relatedness, and professionalism) as being the same size, this may vary from individual to individual. The arrows between each of the needs are there to show that fulfillment of the needs may influence one another. Arrows in the model also show how each of the needs influences job satisfaction. This model depicts my current understanding of the data presented in this study. With further analysis and future research, the conceptual model may be transformed.



*Figure 2.* Revised Conceptual Model. This figure illustrates the revised conceptual model that emerged from the data.

### **Limitations**

Although the findings of this study are not necessarily generalizable to other populations, they are potentially transferrable to similar individuals and contexts (Yin, 2016). However, this study does have several limitations that should be considered when interpreting its findings. These limitations should be taken into account when thinking of how the study’s findings may be applied to other populations of teachers.

The first limitation is recruitment of participants. As discussed in chapter two, I did not receive a full list of elementary coaches from the program director. Instead, the coaches had been contacted by the director to see if they would be willing to share their contact information with me. This narrowed the pool of potential participants. Additionally, recruitment emails

could not be sent until the beginning of the teachers' spring semester due to the timing of IRB approval. State standardized testing takes place in the spring, and several schools begin practice runs of the tests early in the spring semester. This added pressure that some of the potential participants were under may have caused them to not take notice of the recruitment emails.

Along the same line as the recruitment of participants being a limitation, so too is the sample of participants. These individuals were already a unique group simply because they serve as coaches through this intense urban teacher residency program. Through their role as a coach, they receive ongoing professional development focused on helping them improve their coaching practice. This sets them apart from their peers, including those engaged in other forms of teacher leadership. Beyond this, they chose to volunteer as participants in the study. There is no way to know without further exploration whether the findings of this study would hold true even for other coaches who did not volunteer to participate. The participants in the study also come from multiple school locations. Although each school is within the same district, City Public Schools, the schools themselves are different. I found I could not fully describe the participants' schools because doing so would have made the participants themselves potentially identifiable.

The data collection and analysis portions of the study also provided some limitations. This study's data is based solely on interviews. A focus group was offered to discuss initial findings, however no one showed up. Because of this, I was not able to delve further into the themes with the participants. I did however send transcripts of each individual's interview to him or her asking for input if anything was incorrect, or if anyone wanted to add information. I also sent information regarding the initial findings to each participant asking for feedback if they had anything to share. While these forms of member checking cannot replace a focus group, I

did have a few individuals provide some input. Additionally, the data was collected only during the spring semester, which could have had some bearing on the participants' experiences of job satisfaction and career decisions. Conducting interviews at various time points throughout the year may have led to different findings.

I acted as the sole data collector throughout this study. I began each interview by introducing myself and explained that I previously taught in City Public Schools. I believe this was to my advantage, as I felt like I established trust with each participant, which allowed each person to open up to me about their experiences. I tried to not allow my previous experiences or expectations about the study's findings influence the interview in any way, however it is possible that my questioning led the participants during the interviews simply because I had certain expectations about what I would hear or what I wanted to hear. The semi-structured interview protocol ensured that I captured data from the same large time points for all participants, but the structure also allowed me to have a more conversational style with each participant, thereby allowing me to ask different probing questions of each individual. I continued working independently throughout the analysis of data. During this time, I created analytic memos highlighting what I thought I was seeing in the data. I also created case memos for each participant to allow their words to tell their stories and consulted a colleague who was familiar with my study to see if she also had the same interpretations from the data that I had. Although I tried through the aforementioned methods to not have my personal experiences influence the data analysis, there is the potential that my own bias as a former teacher with the school system as well as my ideas of how the conceptual framework would work in the data, clouded my interpretation of the data. I may have seen patterns when they did not exist.



## **Future Directions**

This is a first step into understanding how fulfillment of the basic psychological needs is experienced by second stage teacher leaders in one United States urban school district. While not generalizable to all second stage teachers, this study does contribute to existing research on teachers' fulfillment of basic psychological needs and sense of job satisfaction. More work needs to be done to understand how need fulfillment contributes to teachers' job satisfaction and career decisions with various other groups of second stage teacher leaders. A next step in this line of research should focus on other second stage teacher leaders, whether mentors or leading in a different capacity, from City Public Schools. Comparing their experiences with the experiences of the participants in this study will begin to show if the findings of this study are unique to this specific group of teachers. From there, other second stage teachers in City Public Schools and other districts could be interviewed to understand how their experiences of need fulfillment, job satisfaction, and career decisions are similar to or different from those reported in this study.

Another line of research to come out of this work is exploring how teachers experience the need for professionalism. In the current study, this seemed to be as important for some as the three basic psychological needs. While this could be a phenomenon experienced only by the teachers who participated in this study, future research exploring this topic with a variety of teachers could contribute to the existing body of scholarly work. Perhaps the need for professionalism only begins to influence a teacher's sense of job satisfaction during the second stage of teaching because the novice stage is focused on fulfillment of the three basic psychological needs. This could be explored through future research.

Although the purpose of this study was to understand why urban second stage teacher leaders choose to stay in the teaching profession, five of the 15 participants whose data is included in the findings and discussion chose to leave. Almost all of the others shared that they were contemplating leaving, mostly because they want to work in the field of education in a different capacity. Future research should focus on potential generational differences in the teaching workforce and teachers' perspectives on their longevity in the career. Findings from this line of research could contribute to the conversation on generational differences in the workforce. In addition, this line of research could help reshape the teaching career to include embedded career ladders, which would ensure that talent is not lost, but instead, allows those in the teaching profession to receive promotions, much like other professions.

### **Conclusions and Implications for Practice**

When I first read about the theory of basic psychological needs and how the fulfillment of these three universal needs has been connected to a sense of job satisfaction and career decisions, I felt as though I had stumbled onto the solution to the problem of teacher attrition. If we could just ensure that teachers felt a sense of competence, relatedness, and autonomy, whether through their teaching job or through a leadership opportunity, such as mentoring, we would not see such high rates of turnover in the profession; everyone would choose to stay. I knew at the time that this was simplistic thinking, but that there might be a kernel of truth to it. I set out to explore the career experiences of a small group of teachers in an effort to understand why they stay.

What I found throughout this study was that it is a complicated question. There is evidence that fulfillment of the three basic psychological needs is important to these teachers. It does seem to influence their sense of job satisfaction and ultimately, their career decisions.

Serving as a mentor was a factor in the decision to continue teaching for some, but for others, this additional role did not matter. And while each of the teachers seemed to have fulfillment of the three needs, their sense of job satisfaction varied. They were contemplating exiting the profession even in instances when they seemed to have autonomy, competence, and relatedness.

The second stage teacher leaders who participated in this study are all strong practitioners who have dedicated many years to City Public Schools. They excel at what they do and have been selected to help pre-service teachers learn how to teach through their role as a coach. They described facing challenges early on in their career and explained how they made it through. Given what they shared, relatedness seems to be key to the success of new teachers, not only because the relationships themselves matter, but because the relationships allow the teachers to improve their practice. Administrators and others in leadership positions may want to help new teachers form professional networks to get to know their colleagues and establish relationships with them. Finding a way to build more collaboration into the school day may also help teachers fulfill the need for relatedness as well as competence. This will enable them to develop a stronger relationship with one another, learn from one another, and perhaps most importantly, enable them to provide students with the instruction they deserve.

One of the most important implications for practice to emerge from this study's findings is the need for professionalism. I used this broad term throughout this study to capture participants' experiences, or lack thereof, with respect from school- and district-level leaders, a manageable workload and appropriate pay for the workload, and opportunities for training and advancement. The teachers in this study all began their careers because they wanted to work with students. While they still have a great deal of satisfaction through working with their students, components of professionalism are missing. They shared throughout their interviews

feeling frustrated and upset that they were not respected by administrators, or that they consistently stayed well after school was over and took work home with them, yet felt as though the amount of money they made did not justify the heavy workload. In many instances, the participants expressed feeling a sense of professionalism through their role as a coach, while still not feeling this way through their work as a teacher. Although not something that can be fixed overnight, allowing teachers to feel like the professionals they are may influence how many decide to stay in the profession.

Another very important implication arising from this study is the benefit of mentoring as a form of teacher leadership. Taking on this additional role and receiving the ongoing professional development designed to help develop the skill set needed to be a coach benefitted the second stage teachers in this study just as much as it benefitted the pre-service teachers they mentored. This leadership role provided them with the space they needed to be reflective about their own teaching practice; this then helped the second stage teachers more fully understand and make improvements to their teaching practice. Those making decisions regarding practice and policy should take note of this. Strong mentoring programs benefit both those being mentored and those providing the mentoring. Additionally, finding a way to provide second stage teachers with the space they need during the school day to reflect upon their work may provide a form of professional reflective sabbatical these teachers so desperately need to keep them engaged in the teaching profession. Ultimately, retaining talented teachers like those who participated in this study benefits the students and the school system as a whole. Every effort should be made to listen to what the teachers need and try to meet those needs, even if it means changing how we view the teaching profession.

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## **APPENDIX A – Email Invitation to Participate in the Study**

Dear Clinical Resident Coach,

You are invited to participate in a research study seeking to understand how teachers reach the decision to remain in the profession. This study focuses on the career decisions of urban teachers who are also Clinical Resident Coaches. Your participation in the study will simply require you to answer a few demographic questions online and take part in an individual interview that should last no longer than one hour. Interviews will be scheduled for a time and location convenient to you. If you would be willing to participate, please click the link at the bottom of this email, which will take you to the online demographic questions.

Thank you for your consideration!

<LINK>

## **APPENDIX B – Demographic Questions**

Thank you for your willingness to participate in this study on the career decisions of urban classroom teachers who also serve as Clinical Resident Coaches in the Richmond Teacher Residency program.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. There is no compensation for participating, and if at any point you would no longer like to participate, you may withdraw from the study.

Below are 10 questions collecting your contact and demographic information. The demographic questions are to ensure that study participants are representative of the overall group of coaches. I will reach out to you soon to schedule an interview at a time and location that are good for you. In the meantime, if you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact me.

Thank you for your participation!

Q1: What is your name?

Q2: What is your email address?

Q3: How many years have you taught in Richmond City?

Q4: How many years in total have you taught?

Q5: What grade level do you currently teach?

Q6: What subject area do you currently teach?

Q7: What is your gender?

Q8: What is your race?

Q9: How many years have you been a Clinical Resident Coach?

Q10: How many residents have you coached?

## **APPENDIX C – Participant Consent Form**

### **Research Participant Information Sheet**

**Title:**

Why they stay: Factors Contributing to Second Stage Teachers' Decisions to Remain in the Teaching Profession

**VCU IRB NO: HM20014548**

**Purpose of the study:**

The purpose of this research study is to learn about the experiences of urban teachers who also serve as Clinical Resident Coaches and how these experiences contribute to participants' decisions to remain in the profession. You are invited to participate in this study because you are a teacher with 4 to 20 years of experience who also serves as a Clinical Resident Coach. You must be 18 years or older to participate in this study.

**Description of the study and your involvement:**

This research study is taking place through Virginia Commonwealth University's School of Education. To participate in this study, you must be a Clinical Resident Coach with the Richmond Teacher Residency program who has between 4 and 20 years of teaching experience.

Study volunteers will participate in an individual interview lasting approximately one hour to one and a half hours. In the interview, you will be asked to discuss your experiences as both a classroom teacher and as a Clinical Resident Coach. The interview will be audio recorded to fully capture all you share, but your name and recording will not be shared with anyone outside of the research study.

A voluntary follow-up focus group will be conducted with interview participants who are interested in discussing the study's findings. The focus group will discuss themes found in the data, such as the role relationships with residents and colleagues play in one's decision to remain teaching in the urban environment. Individual interview responses will not be discussed; instead, findings will be presented in aggregate. The focus group will last for approximately one hour, and approximately ten participants will be present.

**Risks and discomforts:**

We do not anticipate greater than minimal risks or discomforts resulting from participation in this study. Every effort will be made to ensure your privacy and to not attach your name or identifiable information to anything you have shared in your interview. The follow-up focus group will be conducted with several study participants together. Through participation in the focus group, others in the study will learn of your participation in the study. Although

participation in the follow-up focus group will involve multiple study participants discussing the findings, data will be presented in aggregate rather than sharing individual participant quotes with the group.

**Benefits to you and others:**

You may not receive any direct benefit from this study. However, the information learned from participants in this study will contribute to the scholarly and practical understanding of teacher retention. Information gained from interviews may be used to help improve teacher retention in the future.

**Costs:**

There are no costs for participating in this study other than the time you will spend being interviewed and participating in the follow-up focus group.

**Confidentiality:**

Your name, email address, and demographic information will be collected for this study. This information, along with interview notes and recordings, will be maintained in a password-protected file, accessible only by the researcher. Data is being collected for research purposes.

Quotes from your interview may be included in the write-up of the study, but no identifiable information will be used. Contact information will be used for recruitment and verification of data only.

The interview and focus group will be audio recorded, but no names will be used in the transcription. The digital recordings will be uploaded to a secure, password protected file and deleted from the recording device. After the information from the recordings is transcribed, the recordings will be destroyed.

What is learned from the interviews and focus group may be presented at meetings, published in papers, or used to create supports to increase teacher retention. Your name will never be used in any of these. Pseudonyms will be used for any quotes, people, and schools mentioned.

**Voluntary participation and withdrawal:**

You are not required to participate in this study. If you choose to participate, you may stop at any time without penalty. You may also choose to not answer particular questions you are asked in the interview. If you choose to withdraw from the study, you may do so at any time by emailing the researcher.

Your participation in this study may be stopped at any time by the researcher without your consent due to administrative reasons.

**Questions:**

If you have questions, complaints, or concerns about your participation in this study, please do not hesitate to contact the researcher at the email address or phone number she has provided.

The researcher is the best person to contact with questions about your participation in this study.

If you have questions about your rights as a participant in this or any other research, you may contact:

Office of Research  
Virginia Commonwealth University  
800 East Leigh Street, Suite 3000  
P. O. Box 980568  
Richmond, VA 23298  
Telephone: 804-827-2157

## APPENDIX D – Interview Protocol

Thank you for agreeing to participate in an interview. The purpose of this interview is to understand how you reached the decision to stay in the profession and in what ways your role as a classroom teacher and as a clinical resident coach influence this decision.

I will be audio recording today's interview to make sure that I do not miss anything that you say. What you talk about may be included in research articles, presented at conferences, and used to help create supports to increase teacher retention. Although I will not be using your real name in any of the documents created, your answers to the interview questions may be used with a pseudonym, which will prevent readers from knowing your identity. There are no right or wrong answers to any of the questions I ask, and I hope you feel comfortable sharing your honest perspective today. Do you have any questions before we begin?

**Walk me through your teaching career overall – how long have you been teaching? What do you currently teach? Have you taught in a school district other than RPS? If so, when and for how long? Have you ever switched schools or levels within RPS? If so, where and what else have you taught?**

**Take me back to when you first became a teacher. What was that like?**

Potential Probing Questions:

- Why did you decide to be a teacher?
- When you initially became a teacher, how did you envision your career?
- How did you decide to begin teaching in Richmond?
- When you began teaching, what did you think it meant to be an urban teacher?
- What was your school like when you first began teaching? In terms of school climate? Students? Colleagues? Administrators?
- What were your thoughts on how prepared you were to teach (in general or in an urban setting specifically)?
- What type of support did you receive during your first three years?
- What did you see as your strengths and weaknesses during the first three years of teaching?
- The first three years of teaching are generally considered to be the novice stage. We know that there is a great deal of turnover in this stage of teaching. Were there any times you thought about leaving? What made you decide to stay?



**Some people categorize teachers that have between 4 and 20 years as second stage teachers. How has this part of your career been? How is it different than your novice stage?**

Potential Probing Questions:

- Were there changes in the school in terms of climate? Students? Colleagues? Administrators?
- How much say do you have in what you do as a teacher? Has this changed since you were a novice teacher?
- How have you changed as a teacher throughout this second stage of your career?
- How have your strengths and weaknesses changed throughout this second stage?
- Have you sought out support since your novice phase? If so, how did you seek it? How did you receive it?
- How did your feelings about your role as a teacher change during this second stage?
- How did your feelings about your career as a whole change during this second stage?
- When you started teaching in Richmond, you had a certain idea about what it meant to be an urban teacher. What do you think it means to be an urban teacher now?
- Overall, how do you feel about your job as a teacher?

**When did you decide to become a coach with RTR? What led you to this decision?**

Potential Probing Questions:

- What are your relationships with your residents like?
- What supports have you received as a mentor from fellow coaches? Program leaders? Anyone else?
- How has your role as a coach changed you as a teacher?
- What do you get out of being a coach?
- What have you learned about being a mentor?
- Do you feel like you are a good mentor?
- Overall, how do you feel about your role as a coach?

**Tell me about how you make the decision to continue teaching in Richmond each year.**

Potential Probing Questions:

- What elements of your job make you want to stay?
- What elements of your job make you think about leaving? How do you handle those things?
- How has being a coach influenced your decision to keep teaching?
- Where do you see yourself in five years?
- What do you think would keep urban teachers teaching beyond the novice stage?

## APPENDIX E - Codebook

<b>Code</b>	<b>Definition</b>
<b>Autonomy</b>	Being able to do what he/she wants to, having say
<b>Competence</b>	Feeling effective, feeling adequately prepared
<b>Relatedness</b>	Feeling connected to others
<b>Teaching experience (_Location, _Years)</b>	References number of years taught or work locations
<b>Coaching experience</b>	References number of residents has worked with
<b>Other leadership experience</b>	References other teaching leadership roles
<b>Work description</b>	Provides a description of the school in which he/she works or details of the work
<b>Pay</b>	References money earned as a teacher
<b>Stay factor</b>	Anything discussed in reference to keeping him/her in the profession
<b>Leave factor</b>	Anything discussed in reference to leading him/her to think about leaving he profession
<b>Job satisfaction (_Teacher, _Coach)</b>	Positive thoughts or feelings toward his/her job as a teacher or role as a coach
<b>People (_Colleague, _Administrator, _Student, _Resident, _Coach, _Program Leader)</b>	References other individuals

<b>Personal background information</b>	Anything pertaining to his/her personal life
<b>Teaching preparation</b>	Discusses training to become a teacher
<b>Residency model</b>	Discusses the residency model
<b>Feelings</b>	Describes feelings related to teaching or coaching (e.g., excitement, anger)
<b>City specific teaching</b>	Describes what they believe is specific to teaching in City Public Schools and would not be found elsewhere
<b>Thought about leaving</b>	Discusses having thoughts of leaving the profession
<b>Why teach</b>	Discusses why they became a teacher / why they teach in City Public Schools
<b>Policy</b>	Discusses how federal, state, or local policy impacts teaching
<b>Second job</b>	References having a second job
<b>Professionalism</b>	Gets at the idea of feeling like a professional (e.g., respect, workload, benefits, balance)
<b>Sustainability</b>	Discusses the belief that the job is not sustainable
<b>Future plans</b>	Describes what they plan to be doing in 5 years and beyond
<b>Ideas for improvement</b>	Discusses ways in which they feel City Public Schools can improve

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<b>Strategies</b>	Discusses strategies for making it through each day (e.g., avoiding negativity, savior complex, martyrdom, locus of control)
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## Vita

Samantha Tucker Hope was born in Hampton, Virginia and grew up in Gloucester, Virginia. She attended Virginia Tech and earned her Bachelor of Arts in English and her Bachelor of Science in Psychology. After graduating, she worked at various jobs, including waiting tables and working in sales. She attended Virginia Commonwealth University and earned her Master of Teaching degree in Elementary Education in December, 2006. She then taught elementary school in Henrico County and Richmond City. She taught kindergarten for three years, first grade for three years, and fourth grade for one year. She began work as a graduate assistant in 2015 and worked with several different professors for three years. She then became a research assistant and worked on the evaluation of the Richmond Teacher Residency program. Throughout her time as a graduate and research assistant, as well as her last two years of teaching, she also worked at a small restaurant. She became the assistant general manager of the restaurant in 2019.