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Teacher Recruitment and Retainment Challenges Post-COVID-19: A Case Study of K-12
School Districts

By
Julie Williams

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP FACULTY OF
THE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION
UNIVERSITY OF ST. THOMAS
MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR
OF EDUCATION

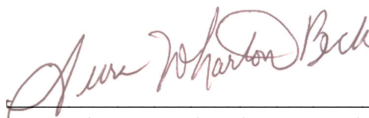
UNIVERSITY OF ST. THOMAS, MINNESOTA

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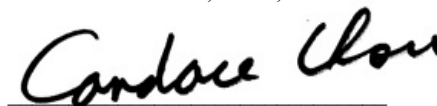
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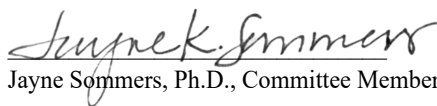
Dissertation Committee



Aura Wharton-Beck, Ed.D., Committee Chair



Chientzu Candace Chou, Ph.D., Committee Member



Jayne Sommers, Ph.D., Committee Member

3/16/2023

Final Approval Date

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to understand recruitment and retainment challenges districts faced pre-COVID-19 and changes or additional challenges faced post-COVID-19. Through this study, human resources administrators and teaching and learning administrators were interviewed in pairs and discussed challenges their district has faced related to recruitment and retainment of teachers pre-COVID-19 and post-COVID-19. Further, the participant pairs described strategies their districts are using to recruit and retain teachers.

A qualitative case study approach was used to identify themes and sub-themes discussing recruitment and retention strategies and challenges pre-COVID-19 and post-COVID-19. The consistent themes which emerged from the analysis included: teacher candidate characteristics, recruitment strategies, factors for mobility, and factors and strategies for retention. Within these areas, additional subthemes emerged. Using qualitative methodology and analytical theory, I found alignment between participant responses and theory. By using the theoretical framework provided by Bolman and Deal (2017), I further analyzed reasons teachers are leaving the profession, impacts their departure has and strategies for retainment of teachers. The four frames outlined by Bolman and Deal (2017) are depicted in quadrants: the structural frame, the human resources frame, the political frame and the symbolic frame. In addition to the framework provided by Bolman and Deal, Bandura offers a theory on self-efficacy that complements and adds additional insight to the themes and subthemes.

The impact of recruitment and retainment challenges school districts face has an impact on the workforce and will impact student learning if not addressed. This study gives school districts specific strategies to intentionally recruit and retain teachers in impactful ways.

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After reflecting on my experience in the doctoral program, I offer my sincere appreciation for those who gave their time, support and encouragement when I needed it most throughout this journey. Joining a doctoral program in the middle of a pandemic seemed crazy at the time, but looking back, it was just what I needed to connect with a new cohort of people and push forward to reach my professional goals. I am thankful for the people I have found throughout the process and the friendships I have created.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

As a district leader, I attend many graduation ceremonies. My favorite part of a graduation ceremony is listening to the student speakers. They share many words of wisdom and offer perspective to fellow classmates. Throughout the years, there has been a theme in these speeches. Student speakers often take the time to thank those in the school system who were a bright light in their school years, offered them opportunities, and led them through their academics. Most of these examples are teachers who made a difference in their life and the various ways the student has felt that impact. When listening to these stories, I am reminded how important teachers are and why we need to invest in our teachers so they can continue to make a difference in student's lives.

District and building administrators understand the importance of teachers and the difference they make in a student's life. As a district leader, I participate in the hiring and training of new teachers. Specifically, as the Director of Student Support Services I have worked to create a framework of support for newly hired special education teachers. While each district has unique needs, all districts face challenges in the area of teacher recruitment and retention. This challenge stretches a district financially as the district uses resources to retrain and rehire each year. It also contributes to a gap in instruction as the district tries to build a foundation to engage students and increase learning growth.

Further, the challenges of teacher retention and recruitment were compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic. Teachers taught differently than they had in the past. They also needed to shift their thinking to new formats and use different styles to meet the needs of students in their classroom.

Problem Statement

There is a problem in K-12 public education. Despite districts focusing on the need to recruit and retain teachers, a high teacher turnover rate continues across the nation (Pierce et al., 2020). Perhaps a study which investigates teacher recruitment and retainment post-pandemic through a case study approach could remedy the situation. “Nationally, roughly eight percent of teachers leave teaching each year, while another eight percent move to other schools” (Pierce et al., 2020, p. 8). Teacher preparation programs have increased the number of individuals in their programs. Enough teacher's complete preparation programs to meet the demand, but teachers leaving the profession at a higher rate creates challenges. “The high demand for teachers is not being driven by an undersupply of entering teachers, but by an excessive demand for teacher replacements that is driven by staggering teacher turnover” (Unraveling the Teacher Shortage, 2002, p. 6). A common question raised by school administrators is what has caused this downward trend in the profession. Why are teachers leaving the field of education? Is it because of the ever-growing responsibilities teachers face? Is it related to salary and benefits? Is it a combination of many factors? School districts have resorted to creative solutions for bringing staff into the school system to solve the teacher shortage and are finding limited success. While the teacher turnover rate is higher than any other occupation, there are no strategies that will curb this if we do not address the rate of teacher attrition.

The demand for teachers is growing while the numbers of individuals entering the profession is declining (Redding & Nguyen, 2020). Subsequently, many teachers who enter the profession leave within the first five years. “Across the country, enrollment in teacher preparation programs has dropped dramatically. Nationally, enrollment in teacher preparation programs declined by 34% over ten years. Program completion declined by 30%” (Pierce et al.,

2020, p. 7). Individuals choose not to enter the profession and teachers leave the profession at alarming rates, all while the demand for teachers increasingly grows. “It is estimated that almost a third of America’s teachers leave the field sometime during their first three years of teaching, and almost half leave after five years” (Unraveling the Teacher Shortage, 2002, p. 4). Many factors contribute to this decline and the impact is felt differently across states, districts, and schools.

Further, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has caused additional ramifications as teachers were required to teach in different ways. The pandemic has called educators to rethink how to provide learning opportunities for students. The challenges faced by educators during the COVID-19 pandemic changed the way teachers approach learning and going forward, teachers will need to shift traditional teaching practices and include ways to exercise empathy and flexibility for all students (Crosby et al., 2020). This, in turn, will change who school districts find as the ideal candidate when recruiting teachers for the classroom.

Purpose

This case study builds on the challenges faced by school districts related to recruitment and retention of teachers and specifically, how that will change post-pandemic. In recent years, this area of study is a growing concern across the country as districts struggle to hire qualified teachers. School districts implore creative approaches to filling vacant teacher positions and offering support to new teachers in order to retain, support, and assist teachers in growing professionally. Subsequently, the COVID-19 pandemic changed the art of teaching in many ways. A few examples to share, prior to COVID-19, teachers started to incorporate social media platforms and online teaching tools to maximize student engagement. During the pandemic and beyond, teachers will need to continue to see the importance of utilizing online tools and

resources to engage students and stay connected. There was a time in history that teachers taught isolated in their classroom. This practice has shifted over the last several years and will continue to do so post-COVID-19 as collegial support is important. Leaning on support throughout the pandemic and beyond is key for teachers.

The basis for successful professional learning communities (PLCs) relies on the fact that teaching is constantly changing, and educators are constantly challenged to examine and re-examine the pedagogical approaches that best satisfy the needs and demands of those whom they are charged to teach (Hodges et al., 2020, p. 6).

School districts are now faced with hiring teachers who can teach and respond post-COVID-19.

Significance

The experiences of students and educators during the COVID-19 pandemic will change future approaches to education. The challenges faced by educators and the requirement for them to drastically change their approach to teaching in a short time frame will lead to needed changes to teacher preparation programs as school districts shift what they are looking for in an ideal teacher candidate. This case study expands current research related to teacher recruitment and retention challenges and incorporates strategies for hiring teachers post-COVID-19. This case study took a psychological approach and gathered information through interviews and artifacts. The insights gained from this study allow the human resources department and the teaching and learning department to adjust and adapt their recruitment and retention practices for a post-COVID-19 world.

Research Questions

This case study examined the recruitment and retention strategies used by human resources departments and teaching and learning departments in K-12 public education in

Minnesota. The research used qualitative methods using a case study approach to answer the following questions: 1) What recruitment and retention challenges did K-12 school districts face prior to the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020 and what strategies did they use to overcome these challenges? and 2) How has COVID-19 affected the recruitment and retention of qualified teachers in K-12 school districts and what strategies will they use to overcome these challenges post-COVID-19 pandemic?

Definition of Terms

Beginning teachers: Teachers are considered beginning teachers in their first through third year of teaching. This group has a higher risk of teacher turnover (Hong, 2010).

Public education: “Education in schools, colleges and universities provided by the government” (Oxford Learners Dictionary, 2021, para. 1).

Teacher impacts of COVID-19: “The coronavirus pandemic has had a profound impact on teaching. As the nation experienced widespread lockdown, school continued, and teachers had to shift to remote teaching” (Barry & Kanematsu, 2020, p. 1).

Teacher retainment and recruitment: The high demand for teachers occurs when more teachers are leaving the field of education before retirement causing high rates of turnover and a shortage of teachers needed to fulfil open positions (*Unraveling the Teacher Shortage*, 2002). Recruitment and retention efforts should be coordinated and comprehensive to be most effective (Pierce et al., 2020).

Teacher turnover: Teachers moving to other school or leaving the profession entirely (Pierce et al., 2020).

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this literature review was to gather relevant studies related to recruitment and retainment of qualified teachers. More specifically, the challenges faced by school districts related to recruitment and retention of teachers and how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted these challenges. I began my exploration of scholarly literature by searching the terms beginning teachers, public education, teacher impacts of COVID-19, teacher retainment, and recruitment and teacher turnover in the ERIC (Educational Resources Information Center) database. I requested the studies that were not accessible to me through the University of St. Thomas' interlibrary loan, Illiad. My research was twofold, the first round was to gain information regarding teacher recruitment and retainment challenges school districts have faced. The initial results were numerous, so I narrowed the results by publication year and relevance. I then reviewed articles found in academic journals between 2002 and 2022. Further, I wanted to gather current research using the same key words with an emphasis on COVID-19. This produced 37 articles, which I narrowed and sorted by relevance. These themes were: background of school recruiting and retention, recruiting and retention challenges pre-COVID-19, and recruiting and retainment challenges during COVID-19.

Background

There is ongoing pressure annually for teacher hiring due to the high turnover rates and chronic attrition of beginning teachers (Reed, 2018). "Trapped in a cycle of teacher hiring and replacement, low-performing disadvantaged schools drain their district and precious resources that could be better spent to improve teacher quality and student achievement" (Shakrani, 2008, p. 1). In addition, districts face a cost factor associated with high turnover rates as it takes away resources since districts need to constantly retrain staff. There are further implications when

outdated hiring practices and procedures prevent efficient and timely hiring of qualified candidates. Some states still use redundant requirements of candidates licensed in other states causing these candidates to be turned away from local opportunities. “Districts respond to [teacher] shortages in a variety of ways: by hiring teachers with no certification or experience, by using long-term substitutes, or by increasing class size” (Jacob, 2007, p. 134). Teacher shortages are more severe in some fields. “Attrition rates for special education, mathematics and science are approaching 20% each year” (*Unraveling the Teacher Shortage*, 2002, p. 7).

Over the years, there have been many alternative paths to earn credentials. Alternative pathways allow school districts to use creative solutions to fill vacancies. Some are creating homegrown teacher programs to develop future instructors and retain teachers (Reed, 2018). While alternative paths help fill vacancies, some of these bypass student teaching and mentoring. The state of Minnesota has adjusted licensure requirements to allow alternative pathways and issues licenses based on tiers.

When teachers do not experience student teaching, or learn from a mentor, it leads to higher teacher burnout and feelings of discouragement and being ill-equipped for the classroom. Legislators have noticed the trend of higher teacher burnout rates (Redding & Nguyen, 2020). When states have policies related to supporting teachers, they have fewer challenges hiring teachers (*Unraveling the Teacher Shortage*, 2002). New teacher effectiveness has been placed under enhanced scrutiny as state policy has shifted to an increased attention at the state and national policy level. “In 2002 accountability gained major impetus as a nationwide reform with the advent of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), revised in 2016 as the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)” (Ingersoll et al., 2016, p. 44). Following the national policy, many states imposed accountability measures that held teachers directly accountable for student performance

on assessments. These measures have implications for teacher retention. In addition, the teacher shortage districts are facing may also be seen as a problem of teacher attraction, distribution and retention (*Unraveling the Teacher Shortage*, 2002). Teacher retention challenges are faced by schools across the nation in all communities and sectors of education.

Recruiting and Retention Challenges Pre-COVID-19

There are overall imbalances that create teacher shortages in states, districts, and hard to staff positions. Impacts of funding on school budgets, inability of some districts to compete with higher salaries, a perceived lack of respect for teachers, and less millennials going into the field of teaching are all factors (Barth et. al., 2016). In my review of studies by Lochmiller (2016), Reed (2018), Redding and Nguyen (2020), Torpova (2021), and Pierce (2020), there are several themes outlined in current data offering factors for the challenges school districts face related to recruiting and retention pre-COVID-19. These factors include the quality of instructors, movement of teachers to other districts, working conditions, and professional development opportunities to grow in the profession.

Quality of Instructors

For a school district, recruiting qualified candidates remains the most important priority. In order to build a foundation of learning, schools need strong teachers and leaders. Reed (2018) stated that the key to student success is found when teachers are delivering high quality instruction. This shows an important task of schools is to hire, develop, and retain effective teachers. Schools want to provide students with support to increase their learning. Teachers who leave the profession take knowledge, skills, and experience with them leaving a large gap to fill. When teachers leave a school district, the district loses quality instructors.

A link exists between student academic performance and the quality of instruction provided by teachers (Shakrani, 2008). The teacher shortage challenges faced by schools further compound the schools' ability to provide quality instruction to students. In addition, new teachers need both formal and informal supports to integrate into the culture of the school which allows them to be more successful (Redding & Nguyen, 2020). To combat shortages, many strategies focus on increasing the number of teacher candidates. These strategies include higher wages, improved working conditions, alternative paths to teaching, and targeted recruitment strategies. When schools experience high turnover rates, they need to spend additional funds and resources each year for recruitment efforts and other professional support for teachers, which takes away resources from student achievement (*Unraveling the Teacher Shortage*, 2002). Schools end up with a net loss each year despite recruitment efforts due to high attrition rates.

Teacher Mobility

According to the article, *Unraveling the Teacher Shortage* (2002), wealthier districts experience fewer hiring challenges compared to inner city school districts. Qualified teachers often are recruited by wealthier districts. These schools tend to offer higher salaries and increased support for teachers. Teachers are more likely to transfer from schools with difficult working conditions as they do not receive additional compensation for working in these schools. Teachers with experience tend to use their networks to gain information and insight about vacancies in more desirable schools. "Historically underserved students are assigned to new teachers at higher rates than white, affluent students" (Redding & Nguyen, 2020, p. 2). High poverty schools often employ the most inexperienced teachers and have higher turnover rates. This equates to the students with the highest learning needs being taught by inexperienced or unqualified staff for repeated years. Redding and Nguyen (2020) found the following:

Underserved schools tend to hire candidates later in the summer and even into the school year. This pattern can result in schools losing more experienced applicants to schools in more affluent districts, leaving more beginning teachers in underserved schools' hiring pools (p. 5).

Movement of teachers from district to district goes together with working conditions in the districts.

Working Conditions

Teacher working conditions are important as they relate to teacher motivation, teacher effectiveness, and, in turn, student opportunities for learning. Torpova (2021) found aspects related to student discipline, teacher cooperation, and teacher workload directly correlated to teacher job satisfaction. Experienced veteran teachers contribute to a stable school environment. Veteran teachers with more experience and higher salaries care about non-monetary factors such as teacher assignments and building culture when compared to less experienced teachers (Gunther, 2019, p. 3). Gunther (2019) stated that higher compensation is still needed to retain staff in challenging schools that are hard to staff. Teachers are employable in many occupations so when they are dissatisfied with any of the conditions they choose to leave. Eight percent of teachers overall are leaving the profession each year which is an increase compared to five to six percent 20 years ago (Barth et. al., 2016). In a 2015-2016 and 2016-2017 study of teachers in Colorado, Missouri, Nebraska, and South Dakota, 82% of teachers remained in a classroom teaching position in the same district, 8% transferred to classroom positions in a different school or district and 10% took non-teaching positions or left the profession (Meyer et al., 2019, p. 1). Pierce (2020) found:

Important factors influencing the decision of leavers: include personal life events; the desire to change careers and/or earn a higher salary; dissatisfaction with school administration; and dissatisfaction with the impact of student assessments and school accountability measures on instruction or curriculum (p. 8).

These further play a factor in the conditions the teachers feel like they are working in at each school. Inexperienced and lower paid teachers place value on factors that increase capacity such as professional development and principal support (Gunther, 2019). Leadership at the school level is important for retention. Effective principals set a tone that encourages professional collaboration and continuous growth (Barth et al., 2016, p. 8). Strong leaders recruit effective teachers and remove ineffective ones. Gunther (2019) stated salary matters when teachers are looking for positions but working conditions also hold weight. Professional development and support combat working conditions.

Professional Development Opportunities

Good teaching does not happen in isolation. It happens in supportive learning environments. Strong professional learning communities are built through collaboration with teachers and school leaders, so all feel supported. Gunther (2019) stated that in order to gain high quality teachers, there must be training as a lack of high-quality teachers affects student achievement and contributes to achievement gaps between different student populations. Reed (2018) suggested there are other strategies that would support teachers that include coaching and mentoring, formal collaboration, professional learning communities, and teacher selected professional development. Districts need to follow practices that work to retain teachers in both formal and informal ways. These include recognizing accomplishments of teachers, providing regular positive feedback, helping teachers identify areas of development, providing

opportunities for leaderships roles and providing access to additional resources (Barth et al., 2016, p. 15). There are more teacher induction programs, but these are often focused on compliance rather than supporting a teacher to improve in their teaching. The value in reducing attrition rates has been proven through induction programs that are well designed (*Unraveling the Teacher Shortage*, 2002, p. 12). Districts need to mentor new teachers, so they stay in the profession.

Pre-COVID-19 Challenges Summary

Lochmiller (2016) summarized the factors by stating, “Upgraded hiring practices, better recruitment efforts, more competitive salary structures and adequate investment in professional development and mentoring might increase teacher retention” (p. 16). Although there are many different factors related to recruiting and retention, the data appears to agree that low retention rates among teachers adversely affect student achievement. Redding (2020) shared student achievement can be adversely affected by high levels of new teacher turnover. The author further stated the overall effectiveness of the new teacher workforce is reduced when inexperienced teachers are hired each year. In order to combat this challenge, Toropova (2021) found leadership support is effective in lowering the rates of teacher turnover by providing better student discipline and decision-making opportunities. The author stated having strong leadership, recruiting quality candidates, improving working conditions and providing professional development opportunities lead to greater retention rates amongst teachers.

Barth et al. (2016) pointed out additional best practices to recruit new teachers during the teacher shortage, which included working with colleges to recruit candidates, offering competitive salaries, developing district programs for aspiring teachers, and offering incentives to teach in a graduating students’ hometown. Also, monitoring workload and teaching conditions

is important as a study by Kelly et al. (2008) shared high teacher workload increased stress and teachers expressed a desire to leave the profession for fields in which they would be treated with respect and dignity. Overall, there is a benefit to having a strong mission statement and utilizing district values to promote and recruit staffing for the district (Gunther, 2019).

Recruiting and Retention Challenges During COVID-19

While districts were already challenged in the area of recruiting and retaining teachers, the COVID-19 pandemic increased those challenges. On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization declared a worldwide pandemic of COVID-19, the disease caused by a novel coronavirus (Keaten, 2020). The coronavirus is contagious and can affect all parts of the body. It primarily causes severe acute respiratory syndrome. COVID-19 primarily spreads when people are within close contact with an individual who has the virus and it spreads through droplet contact, such as coughs and sneezes, but can be spread by droplets of saliva released when talking (Barry & Kanematsu, 2020).

The impact of COVID-19 forever changed students, families, teachers, schools, and communities. Due to the virus, many areas went into lockdown where non-essential businesses closed, and employees worked from home. Schools were also closed, and students accessed their education through remote learning and materials were sent home. Teachers taught their students remotely while also managing their own personal lives (Barry & Kanematsu, 2020). In a study conducted by Berger et al. (2022), 77% of public schools reported moving to online distance learning formats in spring 2020 and 83% of teachers in public schools reported all or some of the classes they taught in-person moved to an online format. The authors reported that during the pandemic, principals shared that they assigned devices to all students to take home in schools where devices were available (Berger et al., 2022). Further, 61% of principals reported sending

home hot spots for students to access the internet. They also reported working with internet providers to help students access the internet and providing spaces at school to access the internet safely.

Consequently, the COVID-19 pandemic placed additional pressure on teachers. When surveyed by Nelson and Sharp (2020), they found the main pressures felt by teachers were being responsible for estimating student grades, parenting their own children, and difficulties supporting students in a remote teaching environment. Remote learning was the primary platform for education during the pandemic and needed to be delivered effectively. In addition, teachers needed to adapt to the varying levels of support students needed at home during remote learning.

The COVID-19 pandemic is considered a widespread collective trauma since it affected the entire nation and has communal impacts on society by disrupting everyone's way of life (Crosby et al., 2020). When teaching remotely or returning to an in-person teaching model, teachers adopted a trauma-informed teaching lens in order to adapt their teaching to provide support to students and encourage resiliency to grow and learn. Trauma-informed teaching “means implementing trauma-sensitive practices to respond to student needs including flexible instructional practices, modified classroom management styles that prioritize relationships over curriculum” (Crosby et al., 2020, p. 2). This lens allows teachers to be flexible so they can meet the needs of students.

COVID-19 Challenges Summary

Teacher shortages are dramatically enhanced due to the pandemic since many teachers felt unsafe teaching in-person in their classroom (Wolf et al., 2021, p. 2). This gave teachers a chance to reflect on factors for staying in the profession. Teachers described one reason for

leaving a district or the profession was unmanageable workloads. Teacher workloads were affecting their commitment, well-being, health, and did not allow a work-life balance (Buttler & Kay, 2021, p. 1). Districts must use innovative ideas to build the pipeline of new teachers. Partnering with colleges to reduce barriers and bring potential future teachers into the system (Wolf et al., 2021). This is an idea that would allow districts to recruit teachers. Districts need to focus on retaining teachers who come to their district. School systems need to determine creative approaches to staffing buildings post-pandemic which could include grow your own recruitment programs and robust mentoring programs for novice teachers (Arundel, 2020). In addition, districts must provide support to schools and educators so they can understand and implement trauma informed social emotional learning programs and practices in their schools and classrooms. This is done through resources to build capacity by providing professional development, school level coaching and resources (Wolf et al., 2021). Buttler and Kay (2021) shared a focus on teacher resiliency to promote well-being as a strategy being used by some districts to retain teachers. The authors also suggested resiliency facilitates healthy distress tolerance, so teachers can cope with the stress of teaching. Self-care is a factor of resiliency the teacher has control over. Teachers practice acts of self-care which increase overall well-being and promote job satisfaction.

President Biden's administration plans to end the public health emergency in May 2023 as the nation moves from a pandemic to an endemic (Park, 2023). Going forward, teachers need to recognize the traumatic impacts of COVID-19 on their students and use strategies to respond. In addition, they need to recognize the impacts of trauma on themselves and their family and engage in their own coping strategies. The COVID-19 pandemic showed us teachers need to be

flexible as learning model changes occurred, learning styles differed, and access to resources differed amongst students (Hodges et al., 2020).

Dvir and Schatz-Oppenheimer (2020) found the pandemic brought gaps in the teacher's digital skills and experiences to the forefront. Teachers were expected to use an online format to provide instruction and to motivate students to learn in this format. Further pedagogical opportunities emerged in the online platform where teachers were able to move from a whole class focus approach to focusing on the individual learning of each student. This provided a different learning atmosphere for students. These authors summarized their findings of the COVID-19 challenges explaining that technology, pedagogy, and educational systems practices blurred as personal and professional learning spaces changed causing teachers challenges and opportunities to reexamine their values and beliefs.

Gaps and Tensions in Literature

Studies from authors Dvir and Schatz-Oppenheimer (2020), Hodges et al. (2020), Crosby et al. (2020), Nelson and Sharp (2020), Keaton (2020), and Barry and Kanematsu (2020) all contained factors that contribute to the challenges school districts have in common related to recruitment and retention of teachers across the nation. While themes emerged in the studies, none are specific to Minnesota districts. Further, they are lacking insight into post-COVID-19 strategies. My case study contributes to the literature by providing relevant data in Minnesota and offering insight into recruitment and retainment strategies post-COVID-19. Embarking on research through a paradigm lens will give perspective to the experience.

Constructivism

When looking at the challenges school districts face related to recruitment and retention of teachers, gaining insight and perspective of the human experience is key to gathering data to

analyze these challenges. Creswell and Poth (2018) stated through a constructivist lens, one thinks meaning is not discovered but constructed. This source also mentioned meanings are constructed by humans as they engage with the world they are interpreting. The constructivist approach focuses on the need to understand human experience—and the specific view of the person being observed is their reality. Constructivism emphasizes qualitative approaches to research. Constructivists believe there can be multiple realities and knowledge that can co-exist and can maintain truth even when contradicting another truth within the same domain. In constructivism, objectivity and subjectivity are brought together—no object can adequately be described in isolation from the conscious being experiencing it, nor can any experience be adequately described in isolation from its object (Crotty, 1998). Constructing meaning of the challenges and areas of growth by learning from others led to a more robust understanding of the challenges related to recruitment and retainment of teachers. This lens pairs with other paradigms.

Interpretivism

Along with constructivism, the interpretivism lens fits when exploring challenges school districts face related to recruitment and retainment of teachers as it also shares the human perspective of those with similar lived experiences. Interpretivism is “characterized as the contribution of human subjectivity to gaining knowledge about objects in an objective manner” (Kim, 2014, p. 540). Kim (2014) noted interpretivist approaches to research do not base knowledge on facts but on an understanding of reality. They also shared interpretivism focuses on how one’s culture and lived experiences contribute to this process. Individuals help make meaning of their understandings through active engagement with others in their communities. By understanding the reality those in the field of education are facing related to the challenges of

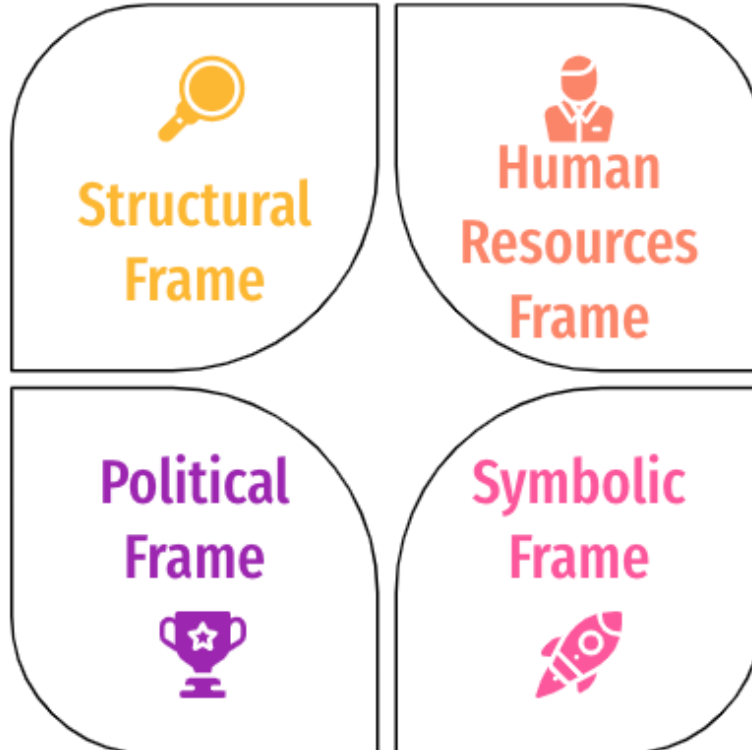
retaining and recruiting qualified staff, this case study allows for further understanding of their lived experiences.

Theoretical Frameworks

I identified two theoretical frameworks to analyze my data. Bolman and Deal (2017) provided a theoretical framework that offers a leadership perspective. By using the theoretical framework provided by Bolman and Deal (2017), I further analyzed the reasons why teachers are leaving the profession, the impacts their departure has, and strategies for retention of teachers. Figure 1 details the four frames outlined by Bolman and Deal (2017) are depicted in quadrants: the structural frame, the human resources frame, the political frame, and the symbolic frame.

Figure 1

Bolman and Deal Frames



According to Bolman and Deal (2017), the structural frame uses the assumption that individuals will perform well if they are in the right roles and relationships. The structural framework is formed by six assumptions organizations should use. These include devising strategies with goals and objectives, increasing efficiency and enhancing performance through specialized divisions of labor, coordinating efforts, collaborating with others instead of following personal agendas, creating effective structures, and looking at the big picture to problem solve and restructure as necessary. As organizations, school districts should use the structural frame to assess whether these areas are contributing to the teacher recruitment and retainment challenges they are facing.

According to Bolman and Deal (2017), the human resources frame outlines what organizations and people do for one another. Organizations look to hire and retain people with skills and attitudes that embody the vision and mission of the organization. These two questions are closely related, because “fit” is a function of at least three things: how well an organization responds to individual desires for useful work; how well jobs let employees express their skills and sense of self; and how well work fulfills individual financial and lifestyle needs. The third frame is the political frame. “Organizations need people (for their energy, effort, and talent), and people need organizations (for the many intrinsic and extrinsic rewards they offer), but their respective needs are not always well aligned” (Bolman & Deal, 2017, p. 166). This is closely tied to the structural frame.

According to Bolman and Deal (2017), the political frame sees an organization’s views as hosting contests between individuals and group interests. This perspective discusses how there are coalitions of different individuals and groups in the organization. These members exhibit differences in their values, beliefs, and perceptions. In addition, when an organization must make

decisions related to allocating resources, there will be conflict between groups. Decisions will emerge from working with stakeholders to bargain and negotiate decisions based on stakeholder interests. There are no shortages of political views and involvement when looking at school districts.

With the symbolic frame, Bolman and Deal (2017) focused on how humans make sense of the world using myths and symbols. Included in this frame is culture which is important to an organization such as a school district. An organization's culture is revealed and communicated through its symbols, which include an organization's core values (Bolman & Deal, 2017, p. 282). As discussed, student achievement is inherent in the core values of a school community.

Decisions related to budget and legislative control play into staffing which perpetuates the issue of hiring and retention of teachers. The political frame challenges the notion that organizations should have clear and consistent goals set by top management (Bolman & Deal, 2017). Rather than top-down goal setting, involving teachers in the process allows them to feel supported. Teachers will stay in the field when they feel supported by the administration, have adequate resources, and a voice influence over school policy.

By using the research paradigm lenses of constructivism and interpretivism and applying the theoretical framework, it is evident there are many issues that encompass all or several frames outlined by Bolman and Deal (2017). These show the complexities of the challenges schools and districts face related to recruitment and retainment of teachers. The four frames outlined by Bolman and Deal (2017) can be further applied to the challenges the COVID-19 pandemic has given to the teaching profession and how the implications compound the challenges of recruitment and retainment of staff. In addition, how these challenges will lead to changes in the way districts approach recruitment and retainment of teachers.

The second theoretical approach is the idea of self-efficacy presented by Albert Bandura (1997). Bandura (1997) proposed four sources of self-efficacy: mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and physiological and affective states. Mastery experiences are performance outcomes that people experience when they learn a new skill or improve their performance of a skill or activity. Practicing skills, then becoming proficient in a skill, helps a person see they can acquire new skills. Bandura (1997) further discussed vicarious experiences or social role models playing a part in self-efficacy because having a model helps a person learn positive beliefs in themselves. The idea of verbal persuasion means a person can receive positive feedback which allows the person to see they are capable and have the skills to succeed. Finally, physiological and affective states are the emotional well-being of a person and how that influences their ability in any situation. All these ideas and skills are important when looking at a teacher's self-efficacy and the impact it may have on their career.

Bandura (1997) shared that competencies are developed over time and take on many forms. The self-efficacy theory acknowledges the diversity of human capabilities. Further, Bandura (1997) outlined that "efficacy beliefs are concerned not only with the exercise of control over action but also with the self-regulation of thought processes, motivation and affective and physiological states" (p. 34). There are many reasons teachers enter or leave the teaching profession. Using the lens of self-efficacy while analyzing data related to teacher recruitment and retention was important as it led to different perspectives and understanding of the challenges districts face.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, I present an overview of the qualitative research method and further discuss the case study approach. Qualitative research allows one to speak directly with individuals with knowledge of the research topic. As Patton (2015) stated, “qualitative inquiry is personal.” (p. 3). Through the qualitative approach, the researcher brings their own background, beliefs, and competence which gives a new perspective to the research question while completing field work and analyzing the data. Given this information, I determined this approach was the best way to analyze the research themes.

Qualitative Research

I adopted qualitative research methods to analyze strategies for recruitment and retainment of staff in a post-COVID-19 world. As we move past COVID-19, the impact of the pandemic will be felt for years to come. Through qualitative inquiry, I gained insight from participants with experiences in school districts. In this light, qualitative inquiry offered an opportunity to explore different perspectives about the effects of COVID-19 on the area of teacher recruitment and retainment which was already an area of concern for school districts across the nation.

There are ontological, epistemological, axiological, and methodological assumptions that frame qualitative research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Along with these, there are research paradigms to use as a theoretical framework approach to qualitative research. As I explored, interpreted, and analyzed data from the field related to retainment and recruitment strategies in a post-COVID-19 world, I found it appropriate to approach my research questions using a constructivist lens.

The constructivist approach offered an appropriate conceptual framework to view the challenges related to recruitment and retention of teachers in a post-COVID-19 world (Barry & Kanematsu, 2020). Creswell and Poth (2018) stated through a constructivist lens, one thinks that meaning is not discovered but constructed. The author's further mentioned meanings are constructed by humans as they engage with the world they are interpreting. The constructivist approach focuses on the need to understand human experience—and the specific view of the person being observed is their reality. Constructivism emphasizes qualitative approaches to research. Constructivists believe there can be multiple realities and knowledge that can co-exist and maintain truth even when contradicting another truth within the same domain. Constructing the meaning of the challenges and areas of growth by learning from others will lead to a robust understanding of the challenges related to recruitment and retainment of teachers.

The qualitative research assumptions allow the researcher to take the assumptions and apply them within an interpretive framework. With this view, I acknowledged that my own background shapes my interpretation. As an administrator in a school district, I live the effects of the challenges of teacher recruitment and retainment. Because of my lived experiences, I related to the challenges and experiences the participants in my case study faced.

Case Study Research

According to Creswell and Poth (2018), a case study approach allows for an in-depth collection from multiple sources specific to the research questions. This approach is used in many fields, including education and social sciences. Hancock and Algozzine (2017) outlined three main tenets of case study research which show that case study research focuses on an individual, group, or phenomenon. The focus or topic is studied in its natural context. Lastly, the case study is grounded in rich descriptive data from a variety of sources. This approach is

appropriate for my topic as it allows for integration of a variety of sources, such as interviews and documents. Therefore, taking a case study approach to the research questions I have outlined was the best approach.

In addition, a case study approach allows for interviews and data collection from participants in such a way that the data analysis leads towards sharing data from multiple perspectives that builds into shared themes (Creswell & Poth, 2018). By interviewing participants with lived experiences, it led to deeper insight into specific reasons related to recruitment and retainment challenges. Instead of a broader approach, a case study approach shares specific approaches, strategies and pitfalls school districts faced which resulted in teacher recruitment and retainment challenges. The experiences shared by participants allows others in similar situations to learn from their experiences.

According to Creswell and Poth (2018), there are three variations of qualitative research case studies—instrumental, intrinsic and collective. For the purpose of this study, I focused on the collective case study. “In a collective case study or multiple case study, the one issue or concern is selected, but the inquirer selects multiple case studies to illustrate the issue” (p. 99). Teacher recruitment and retainment strategies are a challenge in all school districts across the country. The same districts also had various challenges with the COVID-19 pandemic. By gathering information from multiple sources, I provide data analysis that shares common themes amongst the districts. This will be used to further inform future steps to remedy the challenges related to teacher recruitment and retainment. The data in this case study approach comes from participants, so I begin with a description of the practices followed, the selection of participants, and of the setting.

Institutional Review Board

The University of St. Thomas Institutional Review Board (IRB) sets forth guidelines and protocols researchers must follow to ensure proper practices are followed related to the care and treatment of participants. I participated in a CITI program online course to understand the guidelines and procedures set forth by the IRB and received a certificate verifying my completion (Appendix A). These guidelines required me to share the study information, expectations, inherent risks, benefits, and confidentiality agreements with participants. Further, participants gave consent to participate in the study with knowledge of the guidelines.

Making sure participants understood the purpose of the study and agreed to expectations was important. An IRB letter was drafted for the participants to determine whether they wanted to participate in the study. They were provided with details related to the purpose of the study, their expectations as participants, and the plan for the data. Interviews were scheduled at a time convenient to the participant and lasted from 37-62 minutes with the understanding that more time could be allotted and/or a follow-up interview scheduled as needed. All interviews were conducted in a virtual format via Zoom. The interviews were audio recorded and then transcribed by me. During the interview, participants were asked open-ended questions and additional follow-up questions to elaborate on responses. To reduce the risk of information becoming identifiable, I am the only one who knows the names of the participants. Further, the information shared was coded using pseudonyms. After being collected, the data was stored in a password protected cloud-based storage.

I shared the benefits that may come from participation in the study with each participant. The end data was shared with each participant. The participants were not compensated for their participation but may have found the information provided valuable. This may help them further

their district analysis of the challenges faced by teacher retainment and recruitment in a post-COVID-19 world. Having awareness of the topic and participating in the collaboration will lead to additional strategies they are able to explore.

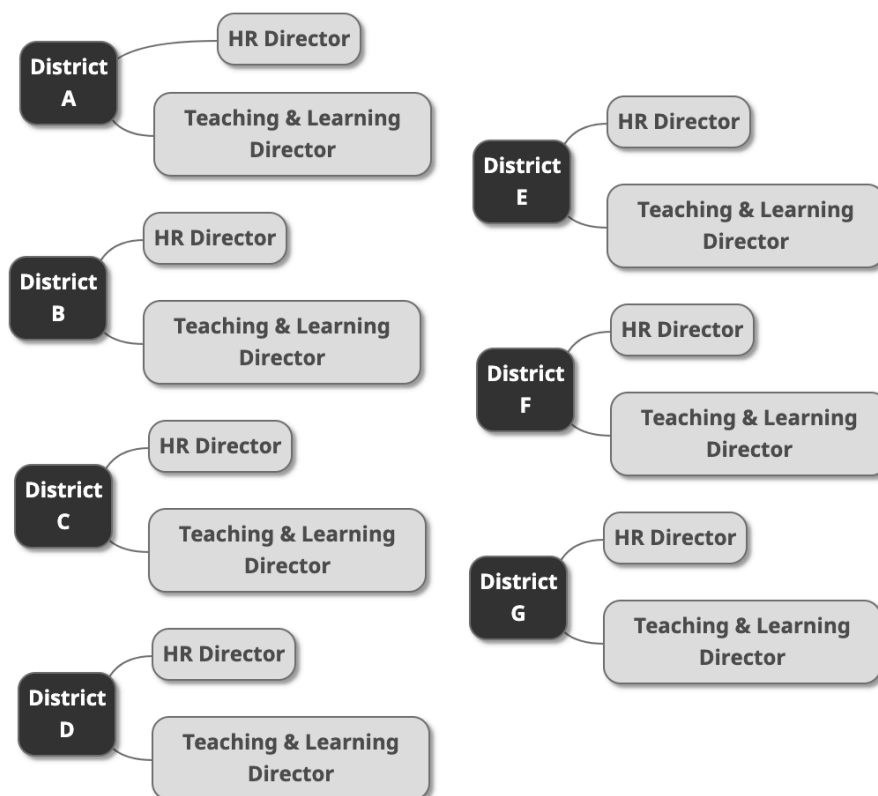
Selection of Participants and Setting

I used two approaches to selecting participants. The first approach included a formal email (Appendix B). As a director of student support services in a K-12 school district, I used my network to reach administrators in the field by using a variety of approaches. Sending an email to administrators through a statewide professional organization and collecting names of administrators whom my colleagues work with in the human resources and the teaching and learning fields was the first step. Then reaching out to those suggested to seek interest and participation was the second approach. Further, using the snowball sampling approach, I was able to gain additional recommendations from this group of individuals. The snowball sampling approach described by Patton (2018) was used after the initial identification of participants. “By asking a number of people who else to talk with, the snowball gets bigger and bigger as you accumulate new information-rich cases” (p. 298). This approach allows the researcher to identify a broader group of people who will be able to contribute useful information related to the topic. Participants were recruited to participate based on criteria related to the topic. Regarding sample size, Patton (2018) stated “sample size depends on what you want to know, the purpose of the inquiry, what’s at stake, what will be useful, what will have credibility, and what can be done with the available time and resources” (p. 311). I wanted to interview pairs of administrators to gain additional perspectives from the same school district. Once the selection process was completed, I had seven pairs of participants.

Once participants expressed interest, I analyzed the demographics to ensure a cross representational group. I recognized I currently work in a predominately white suburban school district that is not diverse in the student and faculty groups. Casting a wide net to invite participants enabled me to include a diverse and inclusive cross-section that ensured a diverse cross representation related to race, gender, age, and background. Initially I had 18 participants interested and willing to participate in the case study. There were four interested that were not able to get their district counterpart to participate due to scheduling conflicts and lack of interest, so I moved forward with 14 participants and seven participant pairs. Figure 2 depicts the participant pairings for each district. Participant pairs included an administrator from the teaching and learning department and an administrator from the human resources department.

Figure 2

Sample Illustration of Participant Pairs



Each participant pair was from the same K-12 public school district and included an administrator from the human resources department and an administrator from the teaching and learning department. Interviewing both individuals allowed me to gather data related to recruitment and retainment practices from different perspectives. To ensure purposeful sampling, administrators in the human resources field of school districts or those with similar duties or knowledge of hiring practices, recruitment strategies, and retainment strategies were chosen. In addition, from the same district, I chose an administrator in the teaching and learning department to gain another perspective of district practices. Further, the 14 participants selected represented a diverse cross section. It was my hope that the conversations between district leaders would uncover obstacles, challenges, and opportunities for growth.

Participant Pair Descriptions

This section provides a short description of each school district and participant pair interviewed. Participant pairs included an administrator from the human resources department and an administrator from the teaching and learning department in each district. It was important to have diversity amongst districts so that districts of varying size, demographics and locations were considered. To determine classification of districts geographically, I utilized the definitions and information provided by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). NCES classifies territory in the United States based on four types –rural, town, suburban and city and then divides each of the types into three subtypes based on population size or proximity to populated areas (*Geographic*, n.d.).

Table 1*NCES Locale Classifications and Criteria*

City – Large: Territory inside an urbanized area and inside a principal city with population of 250,000 or more.

City – Midsize: Territory inside an urbanized area and inside a principal city with population less than 250,000 and greater than or equal to 100,000.

City – Small: Territory inside an urbanized area and inside a principal city with population less than 100,000.

Suburban – Large: Territory outside a principal city and inside an urbanized area with population of 250,000 or more.

Suburban – Midsize: Territory outside a principal city and inside an urbanized area with population less than 250,000 and greater than or equal to 100,000.

Suburban – Small: Territory outside a principal city and inside an urbanized area with population less than 100,000.

Town – Fringe: Territory inside an urban cluster that is less than or equal to 10 miles from an urbanized area.

Town – Distant: Territory inside an urban cluster that is more than 10 miles and less than or equal to 35 miles from an urbanized area.

Town – Remote: Territory inside an Urban Cluster that is more than 35 miles from an Urbanized Area.

Rural – Fringe: Census-defined rural territory that is less than or equal to 5 miles from an Urbanized Area, as well as rural territory that is less than or equal to 2.5 miles from an Urban Cluster.

Rural – Distant: Census-defined rural territory that is more than 5 miles but less than or equal to 25 miles from an Urbanized Area, as well as rural territory that is more than 2.5 miles but less than or equal to 10 miles from an Urban Cluster.

Rural – Remote: Census-defined rural territory that is more than 25 miles from an Urbanized Area and also more than 10 miles from an Urban Cluster.

Note. Adapted from *Geographic*. (n.d.) and outlines the definition and criteria used to determine

classification of districts based on population size and geographical location.

Throughout the overview of my findings, I utilized pseudonyms to protect participants' identities and the identity of the school district. Each district was assigned a letter of the alphabet in alphabetical order. Further, the administrators that participated in the interviews were also assigned a gender-neutral name that follows the same letter as their district's assigned letter. Throughout the analysis of the study, I used they/them/their pronouns when sharing the findings in order to protect the identity of the participants. Table 2 organizes the participants by district and provides additional information regarding their role and years of experience. It also aligns the participant information with the pseudonyms assigned.

Table 2

Study Participants

Name	District	Admin Role	Years in Role Range
Alex	District A	Human Resources	4-6 Years
Avery	District A	Teaching & Learning	7 – 9 Years
Brady	District B	Human Resources	4-6 Years
Brooks	District B	Teaching & Learning	7 – 9 Years
Charlie	District C	Human Resources	1 – 3 Years
Casey	District C	Teaching & Learning	4 – 6 Years
Dani	District D	Human Resources	1 – 3 Years
Devin	District D	Teaching & Learning	7 – 9 Years
Eddie	District E	Human Resources	7 – 9 Years
Emery	District E	Teaching & Learning	4 – 6 Years
Fritz	District F	Human Resources	10 – 12 Years
Fin	District F	Teaching & Learning	1 – 3 Years
Gill	District G	Human Resources	7 – 9 Years

District A

District A is a large suburban school district with a population of 6,653 students and 378 licensed teachers. The student demographic make-up includes 2.1% English learners, 12.9% special education, 9% free/reduced lunch, and 0.1% unhoused. The district provides student services within eight district buildings. There is one preschool/kindergarten center, three elementary schools, two middle schools, one high school and one alternative learning center. Considering the teaching staff, 87.59% of the teachers are experienced educators with more than three years of experience and 66.84% of the teachers have advanced degrees, having a master's degree or more. Of the teachers, 99.22% are licensed in the subject area they are teaching. In the district, the ratio of students to licensed teachers is 18 students. Alex is an administrator in the human resources department with 4-6 years of experience and Avery is an administrator in the teaching and learning department with 7-9 years of experience.

District B

District B is a distant rural school district with a population of 734 students and 44 licensed teachers. The student demographic make-up includes 0.1% English learners, 18.3% special education, 24.3% free/reduced lunch, and 0.7% unhoused. The district includes two buildings for student learning. There is one elementary school and one high school. Considering the teaching staff, 74.07% of the teachers are experienced educators with more than three years of experience and 44.44% of the teachers have advanced degrees having a master's degree or more. Of the teachers, 90.18% are licensed in the subject area they are teaching. In the district, the ratio of students to licensed teachers is 17 students. Brooks is an administrator in the human

resources department with 4-6 years of experience and Brady is an administrator in the teaching and learning department with 7-9 years of experience.

District C

District C is a fringe rural school district with a population of 5,068 students and 268 licensed teachers. The student demographic make-up includes 2.3% English learners, 19% special education, 21.3% free/reduced lunch, and 0.2% unhoused. The district provides student services within eight district buildings. There are two primary elementary schools, two intermediate elementary schools, two middle schools, one high school and one alternative learning site. Considering the teaching staff, 90.07% of the teachers are experienced educators with more than three years of experience and 41.44% of the teachers have advanced degrees having a master's degree or more. Of the teachers, 94.87% are licensed in the subject area they are teaching. In the district, the ratio of students to licensed teachers is 19 students. Charlie is an administrator in the human resources department with 1-3 years of experience and Casey is an administrator in the teaching and learning department with 4-6 years of experience.

District D

District D is a midsize suburban school district with a population of 4,364 students and 290 licensed teachers. The student demographic make-up includes 1.1% English learners, 20.5% special education, 28.1% free/reduced lunch, and 0.5% unhoused. The district provides student services within five district buildings. There are three elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school. Considering the teaching staff, 82.14% of the teachers are experienced educators with more than three years of experience and 52.60% of the teachers have advanced degrees having a master's degree or more. Of the teachers, 96.28% are licensed in the subject area they are teaching. In the district, the ratio of students to licensed teachers is 16 students.

Dani is an administrator in the human resources department with 1 – 3 years of experience and Devin is an administrator in the teaching and learning department with 7 – 9 years of experience.

District E

District E is a large suburban school district with a population of 8,481 students and 555 licensed teachers. The student demographic make-up includes 4.5% English learners, 17.8% special education, 22.2% free/reduced lunch, and 0.6% unhoused. There are 15 buildings that students receive services in. There is one early childhood center, nine elementary schools, two middle schools, one high school and two alternative learning sites. Considering the teaching staff, 90.57% of the teachers are experienced educators with more than three years of experience and 75.47% of the teachers have advanced degrees having a master's degree or more. Of the teachers, 99.17% are licensed in the subject area they are teaching. In the district, the ratio of students to licensed teachers is 16 students. Eddie is an administrator in the human resources department with 7-9 years of experience and Emery is an administrator in the teaching and learning department with 4-6 years of experience.

District F

District D is a fringe town school district with a population of 5,958 students and 295 licensed teachers. The student demographic make-up includes 3.3% English learners, 16% special education, 17.5% free/reduced lunch, and 0.4% unhoused. The district provides student services within 11 district buildings. There is one early childhood center, seven elementary schools, one middle school, one high school, and one alternative learning center. Considering the teaching staff, 86.86% of the teachers are experienced educators with more than three years of experience and 57.37% of the teachers have advanced degrees having a master's degree or more. Of the teachers, 98.04% are licensed in the subject area they are teaching. In the district, the ratio

of students to licensed teachers is 21 students. Fritz is an administrator in the human resources department with 10-12 years of experience and Fin is an administrator in the teaching and learning department with 1-3 years of experience.

District G

District G is a distant rural school district with a population of 1,906 students and 115 licensed teachers. The student demographic make-up includes 2% English learners, 18.5% special education, 36% free/reduced lunch, and 0.4% unhoused. There are five buildings that students receive services in. There is one elementary school, one middle school, one high school and two alternative programs. Considering the teaching staff, 93.89% of the teachers are experienced educators with more than three years of experience and 51.15% of the teachers have advanced degrees having a master's degree or more. Of the teachers, 93.76% are licensed in the subject area they are teaching. In the district, the ratio of students to licensed teachers is 15 students. Gill is an administrator in the human resources department with 7 – 9 years of experience and Glyn is an administrator in the teaching and learning department with 4-6 years of experience.

Table 3 organizes demographic data for each participant district to show the varying makeup of each district. The population percentages for English Learners (EL), Special Education (SPED), students receiving free and reduced lunch (FRL) and the students experiencing housing stability (unhoused) are provided.

Table 3

Participant District's with Demographics

District	Classification	Total Enrollment	Demographics
District A	Suburban, Large	6653	2.1% EL 12.9% SPED

			9% FRL 0.1% Unhoused
District B	Rural, Distant	734	0.1% EL 18.3% SPED 24.3% FRL 0.7% Unhoused
District C	Rural, Fringe	5068	2.3% EL 19% SPED 21.3% FRL 0.2% Unhoused
District D	Suburban, Midsize	4364	1.1% EL 20.5% SPED 28.1% FRL 0.5% Unhoused
District E	Suburban, Large	8481	4.5% EL 17.8% SPED 22.2% FRL 0.6% Unhoused
District F	Town, Fringe	5958	3.3% EL 16% SPED 17.5% FRL 0.4% Unhoused
District G	Rural, Distant	1906	2% EL 18.5% SPED 36% FRL 0.4% Unhoused

The Minnesota Department of Education collects demographic and staffing profile data on each school district. Experienced teachers are defined as having more than three years of teaching experience. Teachers considered to have advanced degrees possess a master's degree or more and finally, licensed teachers have a license or permission in the subject area of the courses being taught (*MDE*, n.d.). To gain further understanding of the licensed staff that work within the school districts, Table 4 provides additional data.

Table 4*District Licensed Staffing Profile*

District	Total Teachers	Percent of Experienced Teachers	Percent of Teachers w/Advanced Degrees	Percent of Licensed Teachers	Number of Students per Licensed Teacher
District A	378	87.5%	66.8%	99.2%	18
District B	47	74.07%	44.44%	90.18%	17
District C	268	90.07%	41.44%	94.87%	19
District D	290	82.14%	52.60%	96.28%	16
District E	555	90.57%	75.47%	99.17%	16
District F	295	86.86%	57.37%	98.04%	21
District G	115	93.89%	51.15%	93.76%	15

Data Collection

Data collection and interview protocols followed IRB guidelines. I conducted semi-structured interviews with participant pairs (Appendix D). With this approach, pre-determined questions were asked throughout the interview with room for additional follow-up questions that allowed participants to fully share their experiences. The purpose of interviewing a pair of administrators from each district allowed perspectives from the human resources lens and from the teaching and learning lens to be shared together. This gave a shared perspective of the experiences in each district. Participants signed a written consent form to participate in interviews. A copy of the agreement is outlined Appendix C. All interview sessions were recorded and transcribed and became part of the data collection records. Participants reviewed all transcription data to ensure accuracy.

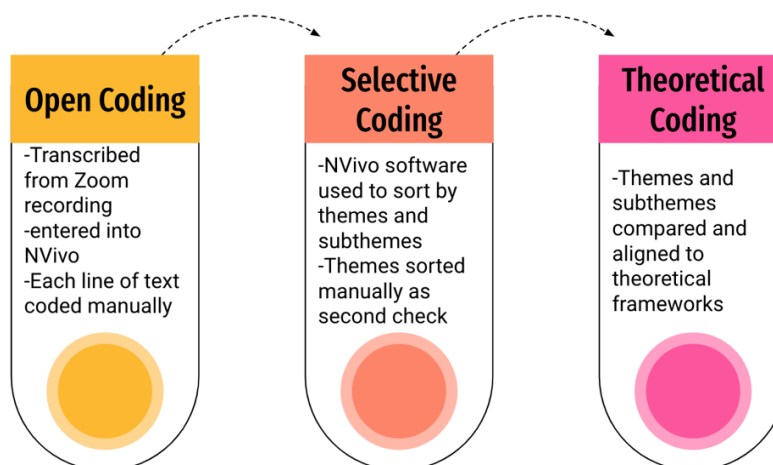
Further, tools such as rubrics, recruitment materials, archival data, and retainment program information served as additional sources for data analysis. Participants shared tools they used in their recruitment and retainment plans and programs. The artifacts included internal websites for staff, public facing website information, training modules, district participant data for training programs and recruitment materials used at job fairs and shared with colleges.

Data Analysis

When collecting data, three different methods— coding, categorizing, and theming— were used to organize the data. Patton (2015) shared the importance of coding as it is central to qualitative research and a way that allows the researcher to make sense of the collected data from participant interviews and shared documents. Audio transcripts from the zoom recordings were then manually transcribed. Then NVivo, a qualitative data analysis software tool, was used to analyze the data and determine themes and subthemes through an open and selective coding processes. In addition to the software mapping, I did the final analysis of themes manually. Figure 3 depicts the process used for data analysis through coding. This process allowed me to code the data, analyze and compare theoretical frameworks.

Figure 3

Data and Analysis Process



Researcher Experience and Bias (Reflexive Statement)

As a district administrator in a suburban school district with approximately 5,000 students, I experience challenges related to recruitment and retainment of teachers. In the past, my collaboration with teams has included creating protocols and supports to address the challenges. Every district has a unique circumstance that may lead to their challenges but determining the common themes to rectify the challenges was an important goal for me. I see this as key to positive changes for school districts, which, in turn, promotes student achievement and personal growth. The background I share with similar responsibilities to the participants may have biased my understanding of the topic. This did not skew the data in a harmful way though, rather, it enhanced my understanding of the topic. I was able to authentically interact with the participants since I share a similar background and experience. Empathic listening was key to hearing what participants were saying instead of anticipating their thoughts. This led to authentic follow-up questions, enhanced my understanding of the topic, and encouraged the participants to be more open with sharing their perspectives.

Having my own thoughts and perspective on the topic required me to engage in self-questioning and self-understanding when interpreting the data. I did this by reflecting on foundational questions that grounded me in my work. This helped me put the data from interviews and documents into the same light while reviewing. Seeing common themes emerge during data analysis allowed for further reflection on the topic.

According to Creswell and Poth (2018), qualitative research is a useful approach but also has its limitations. Using the qualitative approach to research allows for human interaction and interpretation of the data to occur. Qualitative research allows one to move past the facts, figures, and observation. It allows the researcher to interact with the data and hear how the topic affects

participants personally, not just the outward observation. The participants shared their thoughts, feelings, and perspective. Human interaction while conducting interviews allows the findings to grow and evolve while the research is happening.

I made every effort to remain neutral. As the researcher, I brought my own knowledge and training to the table and used this to interact with the participants and the data. This was a limitation also, since I may have inadvertently brought my own bias to the topic. As participants responded to the interview questions, I remained neutral, so my bias did not obscure the analysis. To overcome these challenges, I used a methodical approach, so all ethical considerations set forth by the IRB were followed. Using an in-depth interviewing approach with participants led to learning more about participants than initially anticipated.

Engaging in self-reflection reduced the bias I brought as a researcher and did not affect the credibility of my findings. This led to further self-reflection and self-understanding of the topic. Using time frequently to step back and reflect on findings allowed me, as the researcher, to ensure my own personal bias was not interfering with the data analysis.

Criteria for Evaluating Qualitative Research and Validity

According to Hancock and Algozzine (2017), “a key aspect of doing case study research is summarizing and interpreting information as a basis for understanding the topic being investigated” (p. 63). This approach allows the researcher to evaluate findings throughout the study. Evaluating the data collection process and ensuring validity is important. Creswell and Poth (2018) offered validation strategies and recommended using at least two validation strategies in a study. From their list, I relied on the researcher’s lens and the participant’s lens. Following the researcher’s lens, I was able to corroborate evidence through triangulation of multiple data sources and clarifying of my own bias. Then with the participant’s lens, I shared

findings with participants in order to seek further feedback. By using many methods in my approach to the topic, I received data in different forms, which led to triangulation of the data and validity of the research. By employing these strategies, I evaluated and ensured the validity of this study.

Triangulation of Data

According to Yin (2008), “The use of multiple sources of evidence in case studies allows an investigator to address a broader range of historical and behavioral issues” (p. 115). Yin also shared having multiple sources leads to further corroboration of the data through triangulation. I conducted semi-structured interviews in participant pairs. By interviewing participant pairs that included an administrator from the human resources department and an administrator from the teaching and learning department, I gained perspective from the human resources lens and the teaching and learning lens. This led to a fuller understanding of the experiences in each district.

In addition, I analyzed documents shared by participants. I first analyzed the interview data then consulted the artifacts to see how the provided tools fit into the themes as they emerged. This allowed insight into approaches each district has explored related to overcoming challenges in recruitment and retainment of teachers. Further, I utilized member checking as a method to ensure the accuracy of the records. The variety of sources provided triangulation of the data to ensure validity of the research. Patton (2015) shared triangulation strengthens a study by combining the data from the collection methods. The data collection records and materials are stored in cloud-based storage and access is password protected. After data were collected, names were converted to pseudonyms used in the study in order to maintain confidentiality for study participants and their districts.

Ethical Considerations

With all studies, there are ethical considerations to keep in mind. For this study, I evaluated all sensitive data provided in order to ensure confidentiality remained intact. I shared inherent risks that I potentially foresaw and discussed confidentiality with the participants. I recognized they may be sharing sensitive information during the interview and that we would be following all steps to ensure confidentiality, but there is always a risk of identifiable information being reported. IRB protocols address ethical issues related to three principles: respect for persons, concern for welfare, and justice. As a researcher, I followed the approach set forth by Creswell and Poth (2018) “in thinking about ethical issues in qualitative research [which says] to examine them as they apply to different phases of the research process” (p. 54). I stayed vigilant in reflecting on the process to ensure ethical considerations were followed at all stages of the research process and participants were aware of their rights.

Conclusion

This case study builds on the challenges faced by school districts related to recruitment and retention of teachers and specifically, how that will change post-pandemic. Using a qualitative research approach and looking through the lens of constructivist and interpretivist approaches, I looked to uncover the common factors related to recruitment and retention of teachers so I could learn from the experiences of school districts. Through data collected within a case study approach which included interviews and document analysis, triangulation was achieved providing validity to this research. Very little research is available on the topic related to how the challenges school districts face related to recruitment and retention of teachers will change in a post-pandemic world. This is a gap in the research I addressed. Ultimately, I hope

this research will be used in K-12 education to improve the challenges districts face related to recruitment and retainment of teachers.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

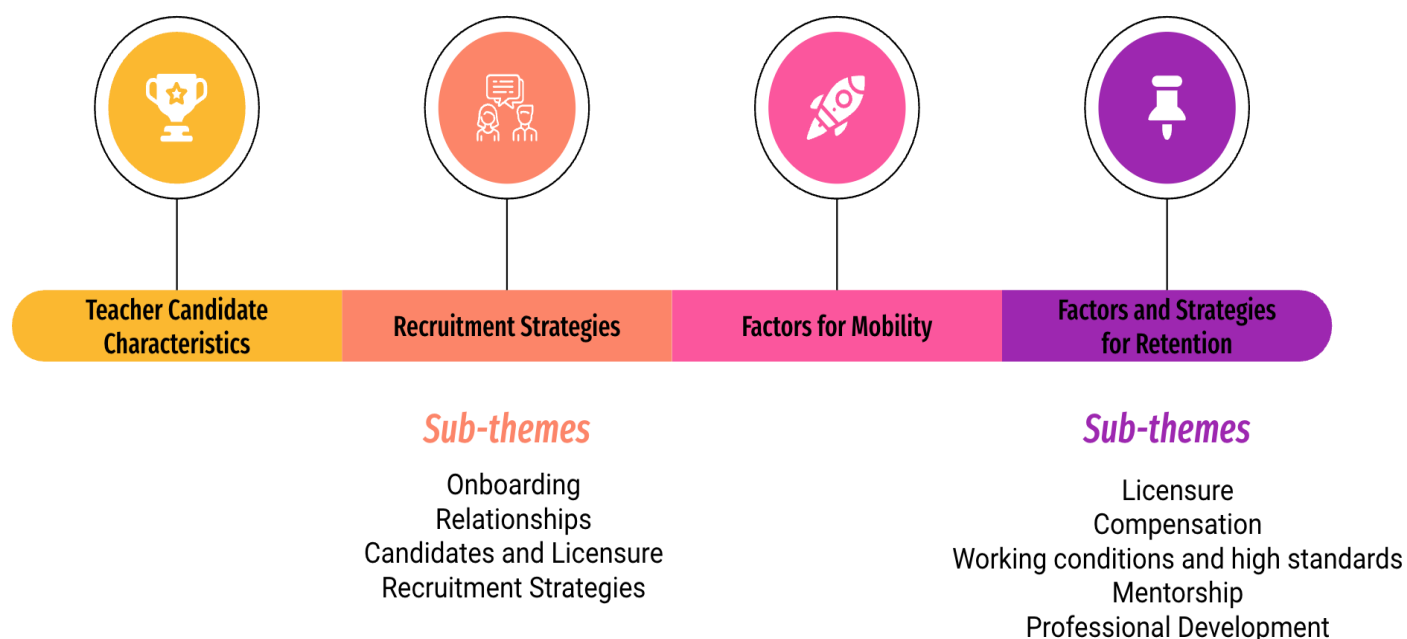
I investigated the recruitment and retention strategies used by human resources administrators and teaching and learning administrators in K-12 public education. I adopted qualitative research methods to analyze strategies for recruitment and retainment of staff in a post-COVID-19 world. The goal of this study involved understanding what school districts are looking for in candidates for teaching positions and strategies they are using to recruit and retain teachers in a time when it is difficult to fill positions. The purpose of this chapter is to describe and explore the common themes which emerged from data coding and analysis related to my research question. This chapter presents the key findings obtained from interviewing seven pairs of participants. Participant pairs consisted of an administrator in the human resources department and an administrator in the teaching and learning department, both within the same school district.

Themes emerged from the interviews that consisted of overarching themes and then subthemes within the category. Overall, participants shared recruiting and retaining teachers pre-COVID-19 was difficult. As we move into a post-COVID-19 world, the difficulty continues and appears more pronounced. The semi-structured interview format allowed participants to bounce between pre-COVID-19 and post-COVID-19 when answering questions. Consistent with all interview sessions, the participants did not answer questions strictly with pre-COVID-19 and post-COVID-19 answers, rather the answers shared detailed the strategies, approaches, and reasoning pre-COVID-19 and how that has changed or become more pronounced post-COVID-19.

Figure 4 illustrates the consistent themes which emerged from the analysis that included: teacher candidate characteristics, recruitment strategies, factors for mobility, and factors and strategies for retention.

Figure 4

Consistent Themes and Sub Themes from Data Analysis



I share the findings which emerged through stories and discussions with participant pairs throughout interview sessions and follow up discussions. Each theme is discussed, along with the subthemes that may have emerged.

Teacher Candidate Characteristics

Participants were asked to discuss characteristics they look for in applicants and how that has changed pre-COVID-19 and post-COVID-19. All seven participant pairs shared that the characteristics districts are looking for in potential teacher candidates have not changed. Casey stated, “pre-COVID-19 you wanted the best people who had the most experience and post-

COVID-19 you are looking for candidates with the credentials that want to teach.” Charlie explained:

The biggest difference right now is pre-COVID-19, there were candidates with experience and a teaching license applying for open positions. While post-COVID-19 districts are seeing new teachers with no experience and possibly no teaching license, but a bachelor’s degree.

Casey continued, often you ask “Is this a person with a degree that wants to work with kids? Well, if so, we will hire and support them.” This included candidates looking for new opportunities and bringing a wealth of knowledge with them as a veteran teacher. In addition to veteran teachers looking for new opportunities, pre-COVID-19 districts looked for candidates coming out of top teacher preparation programs who exemplified traits that followed the district mission statement.

Post-COVID-19 districts are now hoping for the same characteristics but shifting the expectations and looking for other qualities. If the candidate has the necessary credentials and wants to work with children, districts are ready to hire the candidate. Fin discussed, “having teacher candidates who have a disposition for interacting with children is important as this is a skill that cannot be taught.” In addition, Fritz shared, “districts are now asking their administrators, what are those skills that are difficult to teach or difficult to coach?” Hiring candidates who innately enjoy working with children, taking initiative, and having the interpersonal skills to collaborate and interact with families is important. Dani shared, “the ideal candidates are those who can respond effectively and do what is best for children in every decision they make.” While Emery recalled, “looking for capacity to learn within a person’s

abilities and a strong student focus, allowing the structures of the district to support the technical skills is important to their district.” These are all skills that are difficult to teach or coach.

Five participant pairs shared they work with their administrative teams on what additional characteristics they should be looking for in candidates. Brooks shared:

Regardless of the pandemic, schools are looking for passionate, driven people to fill positions. Having these qualities will allow a district to develop the technical skills if teachers are willing to work hard to learn and grow. If people are driven and willing to put the time in, they can learn classroom management and other necessary skills.

This is a shift as pre-COVID-19 you found candidates who went to college for teaching. When hiring candidates pre-COVID-19, districts relied on the teacher preparation programs to teach classroom management and other procedural skills. Casey stated that, “candidates are missing those skills as they utilize alternative licensing pathways, so it falls to the school districts to support those areas once candidates are hired.” Post-COVID-19, the applicant pools do not have many applicants who are licensed in the field they are applying for or applicants with experience in the field.

Alex discussed, “pre-COVID-19, districts were looking for teachers who were looking at teaching as a career and were committed to students first and being able to prioritize needs.” Pre-COVID-19 candidates understood the demands of the profession and that the initial one to three years were going to include high standards they needed to reach. Teachers were willing to engage in the growth process and learn to be effective. Alex felt, “post-COVID-19, these are still requirements, but applicants must learn the process more than before.”

A common theme amongst interview participants was the lack of candidates in applicant pools as all seven participant pairs expressed the same sentiment. This limits what characteristics

you are looking for. On average, post-COVID-19 applicant pools are thin. Districts are looking at how to fill positions, especially in hard to fill areas. Avery shared:

With limited candidates, your ability to discern qualities and characteristics that distinguish a great teacher are far more limited. Every district has a standard they are not willing to go lower than, but the bar has been evolving over the years to a lower standard than in the past.

It is difficult to find candidates who have experience or even have a license in the field they are applying for. There are new teachers who are just out of college who have educational knowledge and no experience. There are also teachers who do not have any licensure. They have a bachelor's degree which allows a school district to hire them and then the district trains them to be a teacher. Eddie stated:

The evaluation of an incoming applicant is not something you find on paper like test scores or a specific skill set; rather, they are looking for the capacity for growth, flexibility and intrinsic drive. No matter what challenge the person is faced with, if they have these qualities, they will be equipped with the skills to navigate the situation.

Additionally, all seven participant pairs shared the applicants post-COVID-19 lack educational background, experience, and licensure, but finding adults who can be flexible and adaptable while enjoying working with children is key. An example Fin shared from their district:

The skill set we are looking for is adults who can come in and they like working with kids. It is not that they like math, but they like kids and math gives them the opportunity to work with kids. They're good at math and they get to work with kids because they're good at math.

Further, Fin shared, “the ideal candidate also is someone who wants to be part of a team.” They are not lone individuals who want to come in and shut the door or do something on their own; rather, they want to be part of the team and add to the culture of the district. Avery added:

With hard to fill positions, such as special education, you end up with one or two candidates in the applicant pool, your ability to discern qualities and characteristics that distinguish great teachers are far more limited, and you are just taking bodies that come in the door. There is still a certain standard in our district like in others, but the bar has changed, it is evolving to some degree, it is a lower standard than it might have been a few years ago, just out of the necessity to get someone in the classroom and the fact that there are not many applicants statewide.

The characteristics are similar post-COVID-19 as they were pre-COVID-19 when looking for the ideal teacher candidate. Fritz, Avery and Glyn coincidentally shared, technology is an area teachers need to quickly learn and become proficient in. During COVID-19, districts switched between online learning, in-person, and hybrid models. Fritz shared, “teachers need skills to navigate technology and use it to teach effectively.” Using technology to enhance the pedagogy of teaching and, as a teacher, being able to have the technology running without having to concentrate on teaching and on using technology is important. Avery recalled:

Teachers should be able to use technology as part of the classroom so technology enhances the teaching so the teacher can engage further and deeper with the students. Using technology should be second nature to the teacher so they do not have to concentrate on teaching and technology, it should be another tool to use to engage students.

In an online program offered by their school district, Glyn stated, “teachers need to be adaptable. They must be tech savvy and be able to problem solve.” Having the technology skills to navigate student needs and leverage the technology for use in the classroom is a skill districts are looking for post-COVID-19 that was not as necessary pre-COVID-19.

In addition to the skills shared, Fritz, Avery and Devin collectively agreed, districts are now looking for candidates who understand the whole child and have a trauma-informed mindset. Avery pointed out that, “behaviors of students have changed so teachers need to be curious of the causes of behavior before applying discipline to find out what is going on as many children and families have experienced trauma.” Devin stated that, “districts are looking for teachers who understand student behaviors have a root cause and are willing to look for this as many students have gone through trauma related to the pandemic compared to previous years.” These traits allow candidates to understand the whole child.

To address the need for trauma-informed teaching, districts must employ teachers who are flexible and adaptable. These are qualities districts were looking for pre-COVID-19, but the meaning has changed as we move post-pandemic. Staff need to be aware of the needs of the whole child and be able to adjust their teaching to match. Fritz shared, “flexibility in the classroom is a trait needed now that students have missed chunks of education and may need additional teaching to meet standards.” The need for adaptability continues as Dani shared that, “finding candidates who have a disposition for interacting and working with kids is important as that is a skill that is difficult to teach.” When a candidate has these skills, they can respond effectively and do what is best for kids in every decision that they make.

Consequently, Alex, Brooks and Charlie shared similar points, pointing out teacher qualities differ between district buildings though all are looking for many of the same shared

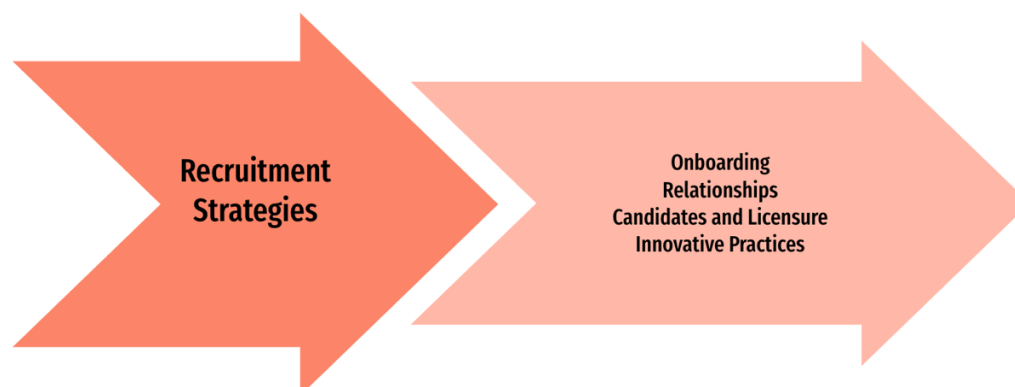
qualities. There are building and grade level considerations that principals are aware of at the hiring level that may shift some characteristics. In general, having teachers who understand the needs of students, have a passion for working with children, and are willing to be a positive part of building culture are all key characteristics for teachers post-COVID-19.

Recruitment Strategies

A discussion of recruitment strategies and the evolution pre-COVID-19 and post-COVID-19 was part of the questions presented to participants. At the most fundamental level, Eddie shared, “districts now recognize and acknowledge the necessity of the human resources department as a key factor in recruiting teacher candidates.” COVID-19 presented new issues and magnified issues that were already present. The main outlook on recruiting from a human resources perspective is to help and assist and be a liaison for administrators who are hiring. The human resources department trains administrators and supervisors to be professionals and gives them the resources they need to lead the hiring process in their own buildings. Figure 5 shares the sub themes that emerged in the conversations within the area of recruitment participants saw as key components, which included the onboarding process, the lack of candidates, building relationships, and innovative practices for recruitment.

Figure 5

Theme Area and Sub-Themes from Data Analysis



Onboarding

The human resources department spends time trying to recruit and retain and manages the job cycle process from the moment the application is submitted to extending a contract to the prospective teacher candidate. An artifact shared by five of the districts was an online onboarding module that helps the process be more streamlined and efficient. Glyn, Alex and Eddie collaboratively shared ways each of their districts made a concerted effort within the human resources department to streamline the hiring and onboarding process. Glyn felt, “it is important to see hiring through from start to finish to ensure the candidate connects with the right people.” In addition, it is important for Glyn to have expectations and direction for administrators posting positions, so they know what to expect from the human resources department as they follow through with recruiting efforts. Alex collaboratively shared:

The human resources department does a lot of work around trying to recruit and retain by managing the job cycle process from the moment the job posting is listed, seeing the candidates through the interview process and then closing the cycle by setting their salary and extending contracts to continuing contract employees.

Eddie shared, “from a hiring lens, the human resources department monitors compliance to make sure positions are posted correctly and hiring teams are selecting legally and ethically the best candidate for the position.” Further, Eddie stated that, “our district created a process of selecting hiring teams who lead the hiring process.” The human resources department trains the administrators to lead the process while the human resources department provides support as needed. The human resources department ensures selected candidates are qualified for the job and finalizes the onboarding process. Eddie stated:

Beyond the onboarding process, the retention is managed by the relationship or hiring manager, so the human resources department is not the contact for the new teacher, rather the manager or supervisor is. We train our administrators so that they can properly guide and listen to staff when they have issues and can help connect them to the right people.

This process ensures a smooth onboarding process, builds relationships, and supports administrators.

Post-COVID-19, the role of the human resources department has grown. Eddie shared that, “there is a lack of labor across all industries, including education which has been magnified due to the pandemic.” Fewer candidates are applying, so districts are just trying to find people to fill positions. Alex shared:

Many districts did not have a robust human resources department more than five years ago. Now, the human resources department is committed to making sure the staff are minimally impacted by compliance demands and their concentration and focus should remain on the classroom.

Alex shared the importance of teacher candidates starting their new position without having a lot of paperwork to understand so the human resources department outlines contract details with the potential candidate. Alex shared:

Teacher unions used to be the ones to share contract information with teachers and now the district has shifted philosophically to letting teachers know what their benefits are from a human resources perspective and then helping them manage and obtain access to the benefits they want and need.

This assistance provides value to the new teacher as they see the district representing them.

Coincidentally, Emery, Eddie, Devin and Charlie commented that hiring teachers is a competitive market due to the lack of candidates. Efficiently moving through the hiring process, checking references, and connecting with the candidate was shared by their districts. Emery stated, “we try to be efficient within the 10-day window of interviewing, hiring, checking references and offering a position knowing that the candidate potentially has multiple offers on the table.” Eddie shared a barrier for their district occurs when they:

Find a unicorn, the perfect candidate, we try to act on it right away because if we don’t, we will lose the perfect candidate. The speed of getting back to candidates is really our biggest prohibitive factor based on the contracts because we must have a job open for so long. Realistically, when we closely monitor open positions and see a perfect candidate, we want to act right away but are slowed down by the contract terms.

Devin shared similar sentiments, stating that, “[they] are trying to be attentive to the applicant pool. Being responsive to applicants is key so the candidate does not move on to another district. Districts should assume there are several districts vying for the same candidate.” Having an onboarding process that maintains transparency at all steps of the process, so the candidate knows each step along the way is important in retaining potential candidates according to Eddie.

Another approach, Charlie shared, “in [our] district the human resources department is the point of contact instead of having each principal trying to make the connections.” After a candidate is offered a job, responsibility shifts to the human resources department to ensure communication continues and the candidate stays engaged with the district and completes all onboarding materials. Charlie stated:

Having a point of contact for questions is important as potential candidates are interested in more than just salary. They want to know the whole package, including salary,

benefits, and additional incentives a district may be offering in order to secure candidates for open positions.

Handling the onboarding process through one department, like human resources, allows candidates to get onboard and connect with the right people as they build relationships within the building and district.

Relationships

Building relationships with teacher candidates as a recruitment strategy was discussed by four of the participants pairs. Recruitment happens through the personal relationships and connections made in various networking or recruitment programs. Brooks stated, “we want to develop strong relationships as that builds loyalty to the district and helps retain staff.” Further, Charlie shared that they are intentional about building relationships through job fairs and collaborating with colleges. They shared a flyer used for job fairs that highlights positive attributes of the school district to be shared with potential candidates. Charlie stated:

We went to seven different job fairs. We did virtual job fairs and in-person job fairs. At the same time, we reached out to as many colleges as we could to meet or send information to students graduating with teaching licensure to see if they had any interest in visiting the district and connecting.

This sentiment was discussed by Fritz who shared they have been able to make more connections at job fairs than in the past as they have been intentional with the goal of building relationships.

A specific example, Fritz recalled:

We go to the job fair; we start building relationships right there on the floor as we walk up to people who are innocently milling around and talk to them to share about the

district and make the connection. Often, they apply for positions because they were approached.

Glyn shared in their district, “we start by driving the candidates around town and even helped a few candidates with housing, connecting to similar age peers and finding outside resources.”

These strategies help build relationships so the districts can grow teacher applicant pools. Hiring teachers and filling positions builds the school team and the culture of the school district.

Connections made through student teaching, job fairs, and people sharing positive attributes about a building or district will bring candidates to the school district for open positions.

Candidates and Licensure

The lack of licensed teacher candidates plays a role in recruiting. Dani shared:

Licensure was a factor pre-COVID-19 when looking for qualified teachers. Pre-COVID-19, there was a lack of candidates in certain licensure areas, such as math and special education. Post-COVID-19 There are areas where there are few to no applicants with licensure in the field.

While hiring candidates, there can also be issues with the license the person holds. Fritz stated that, “they are hiring candidates out of necessity, but their license may limit what they can teach causing issues later.” They state there are times that the candidate has a license but may not have a license for the position that is needed most. Brooks lamented that:

There are concerns from board members and veteran teachers when using non licensed or inexperienced staff to fill positions as districts can hire anyone with a bachelor’s degree under the new tiered licensure system, but this reduces the value of the teaching license in the eyes of some and a teaching license should mean something.

Hiring candidates with little to no educational experience takes its toll on the school district as they must exert more time and money into providing support to the teacher. This is a necessary shift in order to find applicants to fill open positions. As we have moved post-COVID-19, this has spread to all licensure areas as fewer teachers are applying who are licensed. Avery felt:

Post-COVID-19 there are less people coming out of Minnesota or regional schools who have teacher licensure degrees, which is a change within the last few years. Pre-COVID-19, there were a few veteran candidates looking for movement from another school district. This would give you a mix of veteran candidates and new teachers looking for entry level positions. Now that landscape has totally changed.

Pre-COVID-19 applicant pools included experienced teachers looking to move from a different district, along with applicants who were new to the profession. Now, if there are applicants, they are entry level. Alex stated, “districts now find themselves hiring as a matter of necessity, so they have somebody in the classroom to teach the students. Districts are exerting flexibility where legally possible in order to run operations.” This necessity has led to shifting to creative strategies to increase recruitment of teacher candidates.

Innovative Practices

Participants discussed creative strategies used by their districts to recruit potential candidates and fill vacancies. Fin shared:

The mechanism for spreading the word about open jobs is two-fold, first posting positions early and advertising the postings across several websites frequently used by candidates have been important, so prospective candidates are aware of vacancies, and second, sharing postings with current staff so they can spread the news about openings.

When current staff share openings to interested teachers, it helps sell the district and encourage applicants to apply. Further, Charlie stated that, “having to sell the district is new the last few years. It has become a competition between districts so highlighting the positives is key in finding prospective candidates.” Casey added to the conversation by explaining the importance of settling the teacher contract early so they would have that information to share while recruiting.

Part of advertising for positions is also being able to connect with prospective candidates so district representatives can share the district's positives. Charlie, Glynn, Gill, Emery and Avery all highlighted attending job fairs both in-person and virtually in order to share openings and information regarding the district. Gill stated, “making sure the district is represented and making personal connections helps build a relationship with potential candidates.” These participants also shared the marketing information, flyers and emails the districts use to post on websites and job boards promoting their districts.

Using relationships with colleges has helped to share information with prospective candidates. Having an avenue to invite student teachers into the school district helps fill vacancies when the student teachers are looking for jobs as they have now built relationships within the district. Charlie discussed that, “having a working relationship with several nearby colleges has helped find prospective teaching candidate.” In addition, Glyn explained that “they sit on committees and boards at the nearby college to mentor students which helps recruitment.” Further, Emery also mentor's student teachers through student teaching supervision.

All three participants discussed the importance of engaging with colleges and offering creative solutions for hosting college students in all their field experience requirements. Being able to work with the college and provide the experience they are looking for helps get potential

candidates in the future. Eddie shared, “their district does this by having a point person in human resources who colleges can reach out to when they need to place student teachers.” The district can help shape future teacher candidates. Emery shared, “that there is a delicate balance when having student teachers as it requires asking full-time employees to take on more.” Having the awareness to know what teachers have the capacity to host so the experience is fruitful for the student teacher is something to discuss as an administrative team. There are many teachers who feel burned out and districts do not want to put guilt or pressure on anybody to host a student. Student teachers benefit most from placement with teachers who are effective and engaged. This helps prospective candidates see the value in staying within the school district as a teacher once they have completed student teaching.

Emery shared that, “[our district] has an informal grow your own program, so we work with staff members as they are enrolled in a teacher preparation program and then the district partners with the university to have field experiences within the district.” Eddie shared the importance of connecting with candidates stating:

Sharing with the candidates that if you are just looking at a salary scale, you will not see total compensation, which could be important to some. Working with universities and student teachers to dive into the contract and help teachers understand the benefit of health insurance or the benefits of time off. Talking with prospective candidates about the importance of the entire package so they know what they are getting from each district offering them a position.

Further, with student teachers, Dani shared, “spending the time explaining why licensure is important and they may want to consider adding a special endorsement or additional licensure as that will make them a more viable candidate.” This helps them understand the worth of their

candidacy compared to somebody else. It also gives the school district more flexibility when hiring them.

Districts are also using innovative practices as recruitment strategies. Brooks recalled they, “offer an incentive to current staff for bringing candidates into the district.” Brooks shared in their district they, “started a ‘finder’s fee’ for teacher referrals made by current staff. Once hired, they receive the ‘finder’s fee’.” Brooks shared the email that was sent to staff encouraging networking to find potential candidates. This was a creative solution that allowed current staff to aid in staffing solutions. Another solution explored by participants was shared by Devin as their district decided to invest in substitute teachers and provide training. Devin stated, “the substitutes were able to earn stipends once they reached a certain number of hours.” The feedback from the group was positive and helped the substitutes feel valued, which resulted in increased fill rates and positive stories about the district. Another example was shared by Charlie who stated their district, “has used hiring incentives for the candidate to increase visibility for the open positions within the district.” This is approved by the teachers’ union for hard to fill positions, such as special education. Encouraging current staff to share openings or talk to colleagues in other districts generates candidates for the applicant pools and continues to build upon school district culture in a positive way.

Factors for Mobility

A theme that emerged during participant interviews was factors for mobility. There are teacher shortages because staff are leaving positions or the profession. Alex stated that, “many of the reasons teachers are leaving are the same reasons they were leaving pre-COVID-19. It is exacerbated for family reasons, a move, salary, retiring earlier than planned or getting out of education entirely.” Emery agreed and stated, “staff are at a point where one more thing, such as

the effects of the pandemic, can be too much.” According to Eddie, “stress, burnout, mental health, and physical health issues have become more prevalent in the workplace.” This trend occurred pre-COVID-19. People have been frayed emotionally for a long time and it is prevalent in every school district. This situation is magnified due to the COVID-19 pandemic. During the pandemic, most districts were not in a fully virtual environment. This made it difficult for teachers and their families, causing high stress. Casey feels:

COVID-19 in many ways made the world stop and say what do I really want with my life? Do I like how much of my life I am giving to my job? How much am I giving to myself and my family? Teachers are saying enough is enough. They are saying, there have got to be some boundaries in my life and with my time. So, the job isn't harder, but the expectations have changed. It's always been a hard job, people just are not willing to give their life to the job anymore and have realized there's other things, such as family and health that are more important.

It became evident that teachers were able to step back and reflect on whether this was the career path they enjoyed and wanted to stay on.

Fundamentally, Alex stated, “across the country, people are choosing to work less, causing the Great Resignation.” People are choosing to focus on family and personal health. For example, With the Great Resignation in mind, Charlie stated, “some staff have experienced health issues related to COVID-19 and some are having other health issues and then there are more staff and families experiencing mental health issues, which all become reasons why some teachers are leaving.” People leave the profession sooner, as they make life-changing decisions about their physical health. Eddie felt that “their priorities shifted. As pensioners, teachers have a

safety net of being able to step away comfortably financially, whether it is temporary or permanent.” All these factors contribute to reasons teachers are leaving the profession.

Coincidentally, Charlie, Glynn, Fritz and Dani agreed the most common reason for leaving continued to be retirement. With COVID-19, staff are choosing to retire earlier than planned, but it is still the most common reason. Dani shared, “if staff are not retiring, they are taking jobs in other districts, both local districts and outside the area.” Teachers choose to relocate closer to family or to reduce their commute. Now that there are more job openings, it allows teachers to choose which districts to apply to and some find districts closer to where they live. Brooks shared:

It used to be harder for teachers to move, especially after they had been with a district for five to seven years because they would lose money. That is no longer the case as districts are seeing less applicants, they are willing to pay more to potential candidates.

These potential teacher candidates negotiate a starting wage on the teacher contract and receive all their years of service from other districts, which was unheard of pre-COVID-19. This creates the ability for teachers to be mobile and find positions and districts that fit their needs.

Consequently, Fritz and Charlie agreed that teachers leave their districts and find new districts closer to their homes since there are less applicants applying for positions. Charlie stated, “they don’t have to drive far. They are getting teaching jobs in the town they live in.” When teachers eventually leave their place of employment, it causes turnover for school districts and starts the cycle of supporting new teachers in different ways again. Fin said, “they are working on utilizing strategies to address the turnover as this creates inconsistency for students as teachers come and go from the system.” Districts that fail to meet potential candidate demands

due to budget constraints feel the strain when losing veteran teachers and then not being able to recruit veteran teachers who are looking for higher salaries.

Factors and Strategies for Retention

While recruitment was an important theme discussed amongst interview participants, retaining staff was equally important. Alex stated:

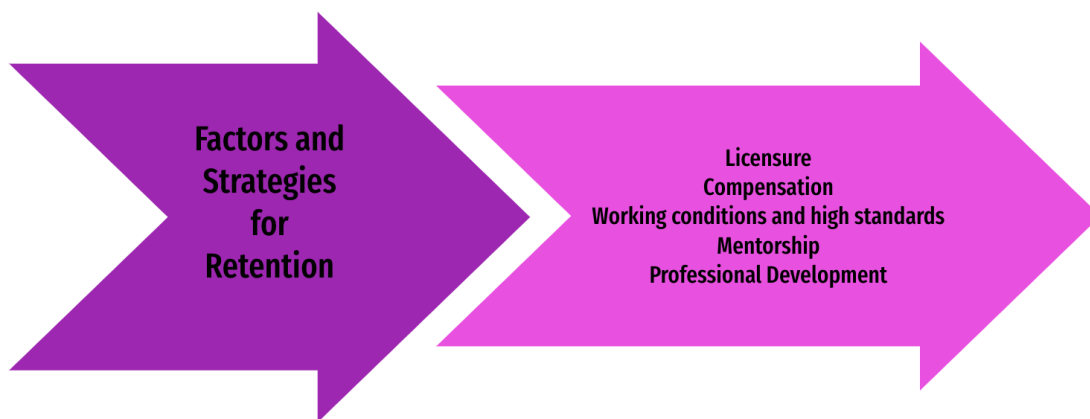
The Minnesota funding formula creates a series of haves and have-nots' districts. We have districts at the bottom and districts that are at the top. The funding formula that drives education pits districts against one another in an inequitable way. Things are not equal. There is no magic that districts can administratively do to retain or keep people who want to stay when districts must work within a budget funding formula. This is an acute statewide policy issue that will see an uptick in years to come due to the structural issues and teacher shortage. Staff can go to other districts and get paid more. Districts used to be able to beg staff to stay and beg and borrow to compete, but the have-not districts just cannot compete anymore.

Staff moving to other districts is a statewide, and possibly nationwide, issue because of the underlying structural issues surrounding the funding formula and given the teacher shortage. Fritz also discussed the importance of the state and government officials finding a funding formula that allows districts to invest in teachers and other district resources. Fritz continued to share that, “our district has a salary issue. Our district is under market rate for a similar location in pretty much all categories making it difficult to retain valuable staff who can go to nearby districts.” Eddie shared the same budget concerns stating that, “this causes districts to face budget parameters and constraints when trying to retain or recruit staff.” Funding is an area all districts continue to advocate for, but since the control is out of their hands, Alex shared that,

“they look towards other areas to compensate in.” Districts are now needing to look to strategies of retainment that can be done in-house, within budget parameters, to keep teachers in their current classroom. Figure 6 shows the connection between the themes and sub themes that emerged during the data analysis process related to factors and strategies for retention.

Figure 6

Theme Area and Sub-Themes from Data Analysis

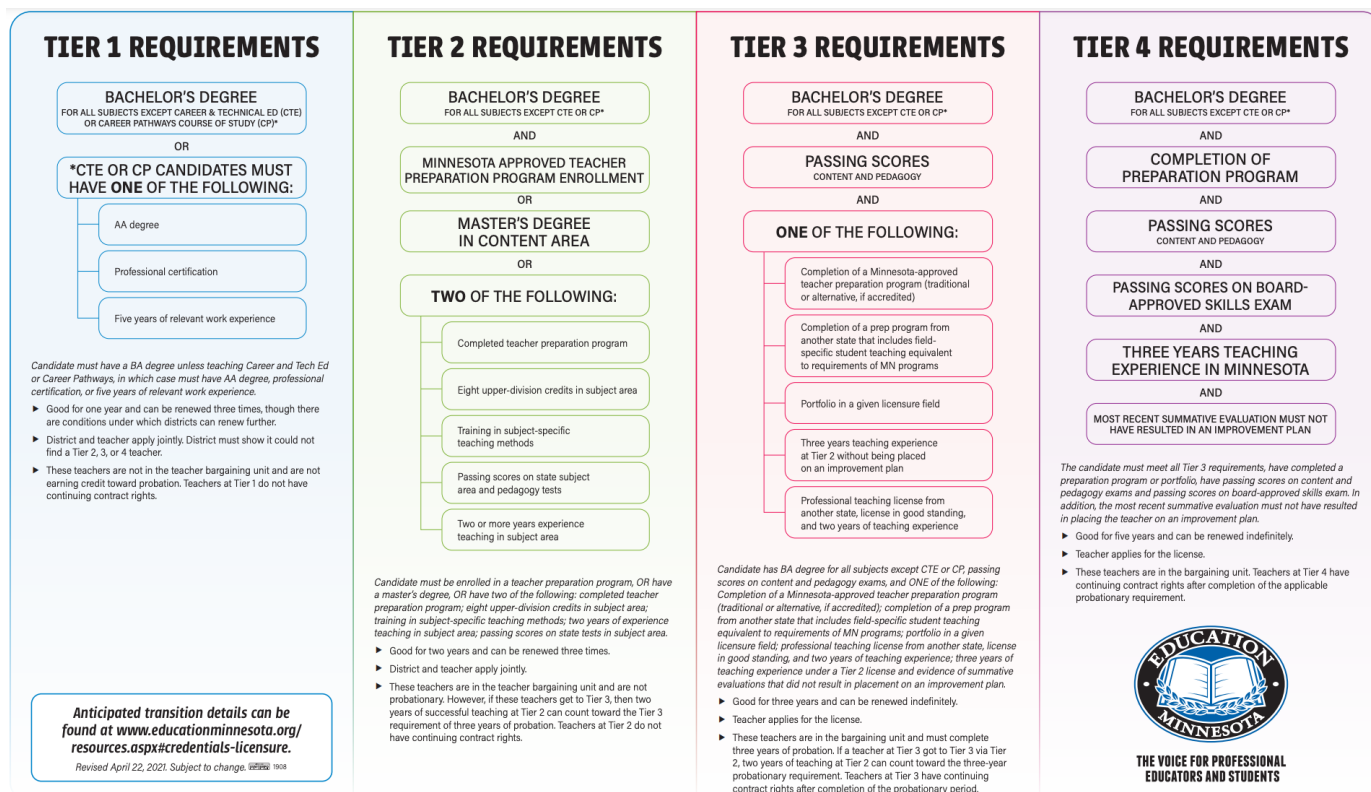


Licensure

In the state of Minnesota, the answer to teacher shortages was to revamp the teacher licensure system. Brady shared, “the Minnesota Department of Education created a tiered system for hiring teachers. The system outlines the multiple avenues to teacher licensure and allows districts to utilize creative options to fill open positions.”

Figure 7

Minnesota Teacher Tier Licensure Requirements



Note. The figure depicts a visual of the tiered system for teacher licensure in Minnesota adapted from, Education Minnesota, 2022 (<https://educationminnesota.org>).

The Minnesota tiered system created opportunities for prospective teacher candidates to use creative avenues for obtaining a teacher's license by encouraging them to fill open positions within school districts and either continue within a teacher preparation program or pursue a portfolio option that allows for a combination of schooling and experience to count towards licensure. Helping district administrators and new teachers navigate the system has been a learning curve for many school districts according to Emery. Emery shared internal documents used to ensure district administrators understand the system in order to hire appropriately licensed staff for positions. Charlie further added:

Pre-COVID-19 [our] district was able to fill positions with tier three and tier four teachers who had licensure in the area they were teaching, and we did not have many tier-one or tier-two teachers. We lost quite a few teachers who did not return due to the challenges brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. So, we had a lot leave and have not been able to fill with as many tier-three or tier-four teachers leaving us with a higher percentage of tier-one, tier-two and out of field placement teachers which leads to more work and support required by veteran staff and administrators.

Fin shared similar thoughts stating, “building leaders are working to get used to the new system as they have many educators teaching in classrooms without having the foundational knowledge learned in teacher preparation programs.” There are now many tier-one and tier-two teachers working in schools who have not gone through traditional teacher preparation programs.

Potential candidates are being hired when they have a four-year degree and districts are needing to support them in becoming classroom teachers, while they potentially enter a teacher preparation program or pathway. This avenue has allowed districts to fill vacant positions, however, it does lead to new teachers needing additional support and creates a strain on veteran teachers. Brooks shared that, “veteran teachers also struggle with this as they are now seeing teachers in classrooms without a teaching license which causes them to feel like a teaching license does not mean anything anymore.” For these reasons, districts must support veteran teachers and validate their concerns.

Compensation

Compensation is a focal point in order to retain teachers. According to Alex, “contract negotiations play a big part in the ability to recruit and retain teachers.” Compensation is increasingly more significant and making sure the district is providing teachers a total

compensation package that is competitive with other districts. Salary is part of that, but so are other benefits teachers receive, such as health insurance. Each district shared their current teacher contract which confirmed the varying salary and benefits packages which are across districts. Alex further shared:

Teacher candidates look at different factors when negotiating. Now, compensation is a key driver, and the teacher is in the driver seat in the series of negotiations that districts find themselves in post-COVID-19 since there are fewer applicants. It becomes a negotiation process driven in part by terms that the district can't legally negotiate as they are stuck by contract and budget parameters. The landscape has changed, and it is a very heightened economic proposition. The district loses on some as teachers find better offers.

Teachers are looking for additional duties and responsibilities. Glyn shared, "these opportunities include paid extra-curricular activities at the elementary and secondary levels beyond coaching sports teams." The teacher unions have now negotiated pay for positions that have been volunteer positions in the past. Glyn stated having additional paid positions allows districts to retain teachers.

Working Conditions and High Standards

Teachers want to stay in districts that continue to have positive working environments and high standards for their staff and students. Devin recalled:

Teachers stay in their positions because of community. Teachers say frequently that the schools have a community within the building that they just care about each other and work together to do what needs to be done for the good of kids.

When staff are already in a district, they know what they like about the district and engage in creating a positive environment.

Casey, Avery and Dani shared continuing to have high standards, even with the challenges presented by COVID-19, is important while districts work to retain staff. The teaching and learning departments continue to provide support to staff through the teacher evaluation process, so teachers know whether their teaching aligns with expectations. The department also provides support to teachers, so they feel supported in their working environment. Part of this support includes districts being cognizant of demands placed on teachers. Glyn shared that “staff feel supported when districts work to lower class sizes.” Maintaining low class sizes is a focus point for teachers as students' needs in the classroom continue to grow.

In addition, connecting teachers to others within the building so they are not working in isolation helps maintain a positive building culture. Glyn shared, “the importance of plugging teachers into the building beyond their classroom responsibilities.” Fin stated:

Principals try to find ways to plug staff into buildings. For example, a lot of new teachers will start in the district and want to coach or lead an activity early and that is great. Then there are others that do not have an interest or strength in that so for those teachers, the building administrator must find a way to make sure the grade level team or mentor is making a connection with the staff member, so they create the connection, otherwise they tend to leave quickly.

This helps form connections for staff and increases positive working conditions. Districts are putting an emphasis on the relational skills and relationships that are developed. Emery shared, “if teachers feel the connection, not only to their colleagues, but also to the people in district

departments who are offering support, teachers will know everyone wants them to succeed, and they tend to stay in the district longer.” In the past, this was not an area that had to be focused on as it happened organically, but now it is a focus and must be real. Fin agreed that teachers stay for the environment by stating, “when teachers enjoy working together it creates an environment others want to stay in.” The connections staff make with each other is an important aspect of building a positive working environment.

Dani shared, “the human resources department intentionally must pass the role of relationship manager on to the building principal so they can foster relationships.” Human resources administrators work to train building administrators to be able to listen to staff, support them, and help make connections in order to increase positive working conditions. Building administrators are more involved in intentionally connecting staff than they have been before.

Avery stated that they:

Put more of an emphasis on the relational skills and relationships to ensure staff are feeling connected and if they feel a connection, not only to their colleagues, but even people in district departments are coming to offer support they will know everyone is rooting for them and wants them to succeed. This has become an intentional shift of support in our district to make connections.

They are making sure people are making authentic connections with others and providing constructive feedback that feels like they can achieve their goals. Emery stated:

Making connections through engagement and supporting teacher’s passion projects is important, so if the teacher brings an idea forward, trying to find a way to make that idea come to fruition so that their cup can be filled at work too.

Dani shared it is more than compensation that retains teachers, although they like to keep a competitive compensation package to compete with neighboring districts, it comes down to working conditions. Further, Dani stated, “as the X factor that keeps people in a district is the culture, feeling supported in all they are doing and encouragement to continue their passion for what they love.” Staff continue to stay in buildings they feel supported and welcome in.

Mentorship

All participants shared the importance of retaining teachers by providing professional development and offering a mentorship program to new teachers. According to Fin, “providing a mentor for all new teachers and other supports, such as an academic or instructional coach, in the building helps new teachers feel supported.” New teachers receive an elevated level of teacher support during their first years in the district through this approach. Fin shared:

The support with mentors is felt right away by new teachers through the new teacher induction program. They invite new teachers to a weeklong training where they can work intensely with mentors to learn about the district, their building and receive additional support through the teaching and learning department.

They even have a luncheon with area businesses to continue to build a positive community culture. Fin continued to share that the teaching and learning program, “over the course of the year offers evening sessions where mentors and mentees come together for additional support at strategic times during the school year.” Charlie shared that their district follows a similar new teacher kickoff plan and includes the mentors to really put a focus on the supports offered through the mentorship program.

Casey shared that, “the challenge they face to the mentorship program is running out of mentors.” This year they added many positions, and a high number of the new hires are on tier-

one or tier-two licenses so are new to the profession, which causes more work for the mentors.

Casey stated:

We were able to hire people. There's just a different look to it. We had a harder time finding mentors with the number of new people and the lack of veteran teachers in the district, so some teachers are mentoring more than one person."

Brooks shared a similar sentiment and stated they increased the stipend that staff receive for mentoring.

Although unique to each district, the mentorship programs discussed had a variety of options and outlets of support for new teachers. Fin shared, "the veteran teachers who are mentors know the building layout and even the community make-up so can help mentees navigate the systems." Devin's district has created a mentorship program that includes instructional coaches. Devin stated, "they have instructional coaches in all buildings who are integral to the retention of staff as part of the mentorship program." The instructional coach and mentor can focus their efforts on getting into the new teacher's classroom, meeting during planning time, and having the new teacher observe veteran teacher's. In addition, the mentors can provide support throughout the school year to their mentee on day-to-day questions related to their specific area and building. Having a two-prong approach and more than one person the new teacher is leaning on has been important. Gill shared," their district includes more than one mentor teacher so that there are other staff who can be a resource person throughout the new teacher's journey with the district." The new teachers report they can get up to speed on core content and feel confident and competent as a teacher which aids in retainment.

Districts also discussed ways they have expanded their mentorship program, so it lasts longer than one year, and some districts are providing a mentorship program through year three

for new teachers. Avery stated that, “their district follows a three-year plan for the mentorship program. Year one is for all new teachers in the district. Year two and three are for teachers who are new to the profession.” The program then follows a scaffold release with an understanding of the district evaluation rubric and providing support to the new teacher. Then moves to understanding the district structures, processes, and procedures. Then finally, focus on instructional skills. Teachers move through a scaffolded release of each of these areas. According to Brady, “their district has mentors meet monthly with their mentees.” They also participate in impact cycles with the instructional coaches. The coaches work with every teacher in the district for years one through three and participate in an impact cycle. This is a plan for focusing on individualized and personalized professional development for the teacher. Devin recalled their district follows a similar plan with impact cycles and meeting monthly and added, “we have an additional twist as [our] expanded mentorship program, teachers in years one, two and three meet with their mentors as needed. In addition, we have district level administrators who participate to offer further support.” New teachers report to Devin that “they feel supported at the district, building, grade and department level.” The mentorship program offers lots of opportunities to engage in different ways leading teachers to feel supported all around.

Fin shared, “in [our] district we are providing specific goals and plans for each year of mentorship.” There is a need for support in the area of resiliency and social emotional learning which the district plans to be intentional about as they move post-COVID-19. Four of the districts shared supporting documents that outlined their mentorship program and duties of the mentor and mentee respectively. The documents confirmed an all-compassing approach to supporting teachers through mentorship programs. The examples shared show the importance of

the mentorship program and the instructional coaches in order to provide additional support for new teachers which becomes a primary reason teachers stay in the district and in the profession.

Professional Development

Beyond the mentorship program, teachers require ongoing training and support. Fin reflected, “as a system, we are constantly looking at ourselves in a mirror and trying to figure out how to provide more support and just do better as a department in that area.” Three districts shared they have added teacher support roles in order to provide direct support to teachers in a peer-to-peer interaction instead of the building principal trying to provide constructive feedback to all teachers in the building. Casey recalled that, “[our] district recognized the need to ensure district level support for new staff and are implementing additional trainings throughout the school year in-person and virtually.” Emery stated:

They are working with new teachers and veteran teachers to provide personalized goal setting, support around their individual goals, critical feedback, and offering professional development opportunities that meet these areas keeps teachers engaged in the district professional development plans.

Eddie added, “a lot of retention is just listening and giving teachers training or skills so they can be successful.” Part of the district level support Casey and Emery discussed was confirmed by viewing their artifacts of their district professional development website for internal staff. The sites allowed staff to tailor their training to the needs of individual teachers.

Districts discussed routines for professional development that included new and returning teachers. Casey shared:

Each year, there is a workshop week before the start of school so the teaching and learning department can provide training on instructional topics. This is a time for buildings to connect with all teachers and build a sense of community.

Fin and Casey both have districts that invite all new teachers to a luncheon with area businesses. New teachers are welcomed to the community with gifts, prizes, and activities. Casey recalled their district, “does this with all districts and colleges in [our] county and it is sponsored by the area chamber of commerce.” Making connections to other staff early helps support the new teachers.

As part of professional development, addressing the stress, burnout and mental health of teachers is a step districts are taking to retain staff. Emery recalled, “being a good listener and providing the needed supports aids in recognizing the stages of stress and burnout and sharing with staff the importance of taking care of yourself.” Additionally, Avery shared, “providing ongoing training in self-care and resiliency helps teachers do their job as they focus on trauma-informed school training.” There are many families who have experienced trauma, especially post-COVID-19. Avery continued, “some students are having behaviors that are coming out sideways because of trauma. Developing a trauma-informed mindset to be curious about behaviors instead of focusing on discipline has helped staff feel less stressed about situations.” They are given the tools and outlets to discuss behaviors and plans are put in place proactively. This leads to staff feeling supported by the school district.

A final strategy used for retention is focused on equity work. Avery stated that, “[our] district started approaching staff development with an equity lens pre-COVID-19 and we are working to continue to have constructive conversations around racial equity in education and using common communication protocols.” Eddie echoed this as their district has seen a need for

focusing on equity in order to address issues to retain staff. “The equity training has allowed the district to have difficult conversations and learn how to address them, so staff feel heard and validated.” The equity focus will ensure the districts continue constructive conversations which will lead to further retention of teachers.

Conclusion

Overall, the participants interviewed shared it was difficult to recruit and retain staff pre-COVID-19. The difficulty has become more pronounced as we move post-COVID-19 and it remains difficult to fill positions, but there are far less applicants. The consistent themes which emerged amongst participants included: teacher candidate characteristics, recruitment strategies, factors for mobility, and factors and strategies for retention. There are fewer applicants applying for positions, which makes the job market competitive. Although candidates have less experience, districts are hiring and then increasing the support offered for new staff to build capacity amongst their teachers.

School districts have increased their recruitment strategies to become more viable and retain staff. Participants shared creative strategies they are using to recruit and retain staff, such as pay incentives and increased compensation packages, along with expanding on current programming, such as mentorship programs. Participants noted they are being intentional with supports and strategies because they are not happening organically like they had in the past. Connecting staff, providing support at all levels has been critical to maintaining positive working conditions and building culture.

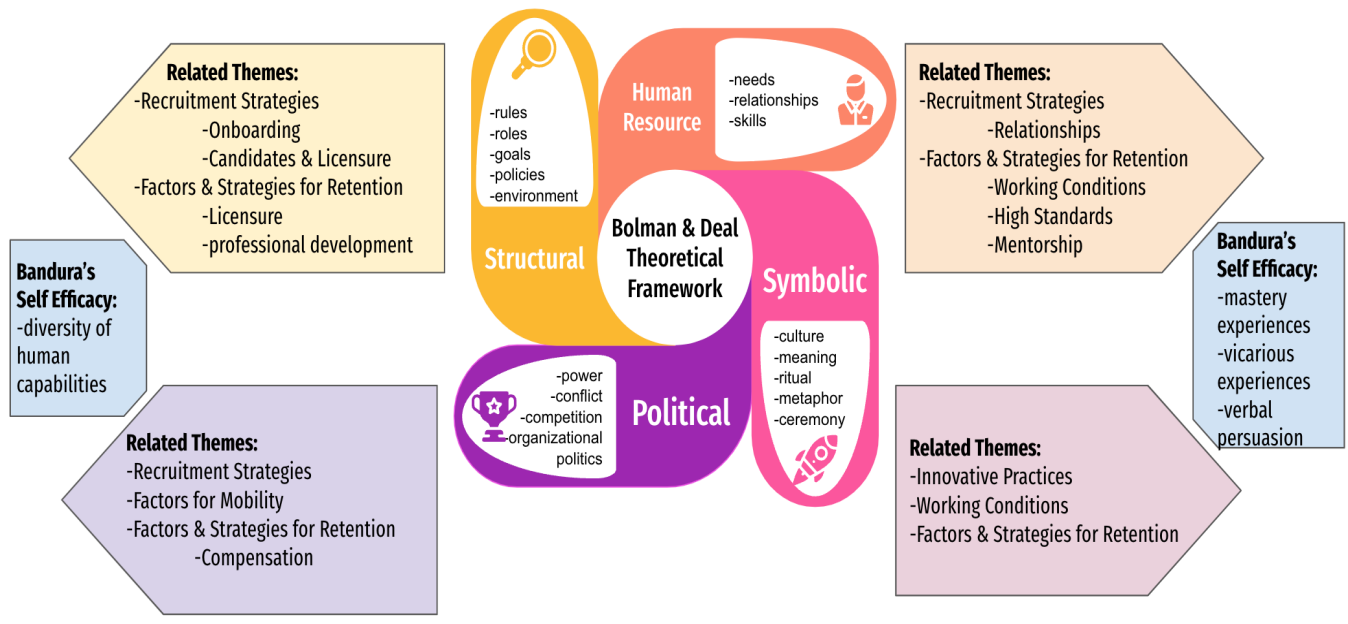
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to examine the recruitment and retention strategies used by K-12 public school districts in Minnesota. Specifically, I interviewed seven pairs of administrators from school districts. Participant pairs consisted of an administrator in the human resources department and an administrator in the teaching and learning department, both within the same school district. The consistent themes which emerged from the analysis identified in Chapter Four included: teacher candidate characteristics, recruitment strategies, factors for mobility, and factors and strategies for retention.

In this chapter, I will analyze the themes from Chapter Four using the theories outlined in Chapter Two, the theoretical framework presented by Bolman and Deal (2017) and the self-efficacy theory presented by Bandura (1997). Figure 8 provides an overview of how the findings and analysis connect to the themes and subthemes presented in Chapter Four.

Figure 8

Themes and Sub-themes from Findings Connected to Theories



Bolman and Deal Theoretical Framework

When I reviewed the themes and subthemes that emerged from participant interviews in the context of Bolman and Deal's (2017) theoretical framework, it is evident these themes fit this theoretical approach. By using the theoretical framework provided by Bolman and Deal (2017), we can further analyze reasons teachers are leaving the profession, impacts their departure has on the district, and strategies for retainment of teachers. The four frames outlined by Bolman and Deal (2017) are depicted in quadrants: the structural frame, the human resources frame, the political frame and the symbolic frame.

The structural frame outlined by Bolman and Deal (2017) provides a frame to view organizations with a focus on the design of the organization which includes rules, roles, goals, policies and the environment. The structural frame uses the assumption that individuals will perform well if they are in the right roles and relationships (Bolman & Deal, 2017). A key theme shared by participants is the need for onboarding processes and procedures that recruit candidates. In addition, navigating the rules and policies around candidate licensure as there is a shortage of available licensed teachers so being able to explore alternative license avenues is an aspect of recruitment. By understanding the rules that govern teacher licensure, districts are also able to retain staff under alternative licensure pathways. Further, having a detailed plan for professional development activities to support teachers in their new roles was discussed during participant interviews. As organizations, school districts should use the structural frame to assess whether these areas are contributing to the teacher recruitment and retainment challenges they face.

Bolman and Deal (2017) shared the human resource frame which allows organizations to emphasize that management must understand relationships, needs, and skills of people within the

organization. The human resources frame outlines what organizations and people do for one another (Bolman & Deal, 2017, p. 145). Organizations ask, “How do we find and retain people with the skills and attitudes to do the work?” Workers want to know, “How well will this place work for me?” These two questions are closely related, because “fit” is a function of at least three things: how well an organization responds to individual desires for useful work; how well jobs let employees express their skills and sense of self; and how well work fulfills individual financial and lifestyle needs (Bolman & Deal, 2017, p. 145). A key theme discussed by participants was the need to build relationships with new hires and veteran teachers to create working conditions that foster collaboration so schools can retain teachers. Building upon a culture of success and having high standards for staff and students was discussed by districts as a way to retain teachers.

The political frame outlined by Bolman and Deal (2017) provides a frame to view the organization as a competitive place competing for interests through power and conflict. This is closely tied to the structural frame. Districts shared they must stay competitive for teachers to stay with the district as there are many factors for mobility. Some factors cannot be helped, such as staff moving, but other factors must be considered. These include compensation and benefits packages. In addition to building a positive culture in the schools, the districts also work to ensure teachers are offered a competitive contract package to retain employees.

The last frame outlined by Bolman and Deal (2017) is the symbolic frame which provides a frame to view the organization that focuses on culture, meaning and rituals. “The symbolic frame focuses on how myth and symbols help humans make sense of the chaotic, ambiguous world in which they live” (Bolman & Deal, 2017, p. 277). Included in this frame is culture which is important to an organization such as a school district. An organization's culture is revealed and

communicated through its symbols, which include an organization's core values (Bolman & Deal, 2017, p. 282). Districts and schools spend time building their culture so that all staff see it as a place they want to work. Providing collaborative workspaces and meeting the needs of staff was a theme discussed by all interview participants. Utilizing recruitment and retainment strategies to show the positive working environment is a strategy districts employ.

Bandura's Self Efficacy Theory

In addition to the framework provided by Bolman and Deal (2017), Bandura (1997) offered a theory on self-efficacy that complements and adds additional insight to the themes and subthemes from the findings chapter. Bandura (1997) proposed four sources of self-efficacy: mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and physiological and affective states. Three of these areas, mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, and verbal persuasion, align with the participant interview discussions related to teacher recruitment and retainment strategies. In addition, these align with the human resources and symbolic frames outlined by Bolman and Deal (2017).

Mastery experiences are performance outcomes people experience when they learn a new skill or improve their performance of a skill or activity. Practicing skills, then becoming proficient in a skill, helps a person see they can acquire new skills. A key theme shared by interview participants was the importance of building relationships with new teachers. Having a relationship with new teachers allows the teacher to feel comfortable asking for support and feedback. Having positive mastery experiences allows teachers to build on their positive working conditions and contribute to the high standards expected by school districts for their staff and students.

Bandura (1997) further discussed vicarious experiences or social role models playing a part in self-efficacy because having a model helps a person learn positive beliefs in themselves. The idea of verbal persuasion means a person can receive positive feedback which allows the person to see they are capable and have skills to succeed. High quality professional development and a robust mentorship program allows staff to work closely with a mentor teacher to receive a positive role model in the building. Mentors provide mentorship to the teacher and an outlet for positive feedback directly tied to their work in the classroom.

Finally, Bandura (1997) shared our competencies are developed over time and take on many forms. The self-efficacy theory acknowledges the diversity of human capabilities. This aligns with Bolman and Deal's (2017) structural and political frames. Incoming teachers have many different views and abilities when hired. Participants shared the importance of the human resources department being directly involved in the hiring and onboarding process in order to meet the needs of all new hires. Further, the human resources department can work with staff on factors for mobility and address those factors as part of their strategies for retention.

Conclusion

Bolman and Deal (2017) provide a theoretical framework that connects Bandura's (1997) self-efficacy theory. These are connected to the theories and theoretical frameworks presented in the paper and further discussed in this chapter. The findings and themes emerged from the analysis included: teacher candidate characteristics, recruitment strategies, factors for mobility, and factors and strategies for retention. The four frames outlined by Bolman and Deal (2017) provide quadrants: the structural frame, the human resources frame, the political frame and the symbolic frame. The findings presented in the study are connected to the theory and provide

additional insight for organizations as they increase strategies for recruitment and retention of teachers.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

This chapter provides a summary of the research, implications, limitations, and recommendations. The purpose of this study was to understand what school districts are looking for in candidates for teaching positions and strategies they are using to recruit and retain teachers in a time when it is difficult to fill positions. Specifically, this case study examined the recruitment and retention strategies used by human resources departments and teaching and learning departments in K-12 public education in Minnesota. The research explored the following questions: 1) What recruitment and retention challenges did K-12 school districts face prior to the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020 and what strategies did they use to overcome these challenges? and 2) How has COVID-19 affected the recruitment and retention of qualified teachers in K-12 school districts and what strategies will they use to overcome these challenges post-COVID-19 pandemic?

I interviewed seven pairs of administrators from school districts. Participant pairs consisted of an administrator in the human resources department and an administrator in the teaching and learning department, both within the same school district. I used a semi-structured interview approach with the participant pairs. With this approach, pre-determined questions were asked throughout the interview with room for additional follow-up questions which allowed participants to fully share their experiences.

Summary of Research

Through this study, human resources administrators and teaching and learning administrators were interviewed in pairs and discussed challenges their district faced related to recruitment and retainment of teachers pre-COVID-19 and post-COVID-19. Further, the participant pairs described strategies their districts are using to recruit and retain teachers.

Through collection and analysis of interview data, I identified themes and sub-themes discussing recruitment and retention strategies and challenges pre-COVID-19 and post-COVID-19.

Through an analysis of interview data, consistent themes and subthemes emerged. The themes in the data included: teacher candidate characteristics, recruitment strategies, factors for mobility, and factors and strategies for retention and are shown in illustration in Figure 9 discussed earlier. Interview participants shared recruitment and retention strategies used in their school district and discussed additional factors districts face. Initially, I thought there would be a difference between pre-COVID-19 and post-COVID-19 approaches and challenges. Through interview data, it is evident that challenges related to recruitment and retainment of teachers were present pre-COVID-19 and have continued post-COVID-19 at a higher level.

Using qualitative methodology and analytical theory, I found alignment between participant responses and theory. By using the theoretical framework provided by Bolman and Deal (2017), I further analyzed reasons teachers are leaving the professions, impacts of their departure, and strategies for retainment of teachers. In addition to the framework provided by Bolman and Deal (2017), Bandura (1997) offered a theory on self-efficacy that complements and adds additional insight to the themes and subthemes and is shown in Figure 4 and discussed earlier.

Figure 8, discussed and shown earlier, provides an analysis of interview data provided insight into recruitment and retainment challenges school districts have faced pre-COVID-19 and how those challenges have increased post-COVID-19. I learned districts were facing staffing challenges pre-pandemic and those have been exacerbated as we are living with the pandemic and there is a lack of candidates. Participants shared many strategies for recruitment and

retention of teachers that districts should do to increase recruitment and retention of teachers. In addition, they shared factors for staff leaving the district and profession.

Districts continue to seek top candidates with experience. This has shifted post-COVID-19 as districts have had to shift expectations to recruit and retain staff who have the required credentials and a willingness to learn. As teacher candidates do not have extensive experience, districts are shifting focus to building relationships, creating a positive culture, and providing support to teachers.

Districts utilize a variety of strategies to recruit candidates to fill open teacher positions. Networking at job fairs and posting open positions in a variety of places allows districts to share positive traits about their school districts so candidates will apply for open positions. Also, building upon the strategies currently in place, like bringing student teachers into the buildings so they can start making connections and sharing in the positive building culture. Further creative strategies should be explored, such as hiring incentives for current staff.

The human resources administrators interviewed shared strategies for increasing efficiency in the department by aligning the hiring process. This requires the whole budgeting system to shift from the process that was used pre-COVID-19 to what is needed now in order to be ready for postings. All departments must work together to ensure the process of hiring goes smoothly. The examples shared support that having an effective process for onboarding staff allows new hires to build positive relationships right away by starting the hiring process early, using an efficient timeline and communicating with potential candidates so they stay within your system.

In addition to recruitment strategies, districts continue to focus on retaining staff. A theme that emerged from the interview data was the importance of building relationships with

staff and providing support to new teachers. The ability to connect new teachers to each other outside of the workday for them to have a connection in the area and build a sense of community not only at school but within the community helps retain staff. Even finding out whether a new teacher is interested in coaching, advising or leading other activities. This allows for further connection to the staff, students and community.

Licensing requirements allow teachers to be hired with minimal credentials in the field they are teaching in. Due to this, teachers need additional support and critical feedback in order to maintain high standards in the schools. Providing professional development opportunities so teachers can reflect, and grow was shared as an important strategy to retain staff.

Further, expanding teacher mentorship programs to provide support past the first year is utilized by several districts interviewed in order to provide additional support to new teachers. Strong mentorship programs are important to retaining staff. All the districts participating in the study have a variation of a mentorship program. Through an informal or formal program, new teachers need to feel supported. Participants discussed continuing to expand recruitment and retainment strategies in order to continue to fill and maintain positions within the classroom.

Implications

The findings from this study have significant implications for school districts. In my review of studies by Lochmiller (2016), Reed (2018), Redding and Nguyen (2020), Torpova (2021), and Pierce (2020), there are themes in their research describing factors for the challenges school districts faced related to recruiting and retention pre-COVID-19. These factors include the quality of instructors, movement of teachers to other districts, working conditions, and professional development opportunities to grow in the profession. Dvir and Schatz-

Oppenheimer (2020) found the COVID-19 pandemic brought additional factors that exacerbated the ongoing challenges districts already faced related to recruitment and retention of teachers.

The challenges related to recruitment and retainment of teachers impacts the workforce and impacts student learners. Redding (2020) shared student achievement can be adversely affected by high levels of new teacher turnover. When schools experience high turnover rates, they need to spend additional funds and resources each year for recruitment efforts and other professional support for teachers, which takes away resources from student achievement (*Unraveling the Teacher Shortage*, 2002). Subsequently, many teachers who enter the profession leave within the first five years (Redding & Nguyen, 2020). School districts must address recruitment and retention of teachers in order to provide quality instruction to children.

Future Research

This study did not measure student outcomes or impacts related to recruitment and retainment challenges districts have faced. Future research is needed to understand how these factors impact student outcomes. In addition, future studies could be conducted to replicate the study on a larger scale to understand challenges related to recruitment and retainment of teachers from a broader scale nation or worldwide. Further, adding a mixed methods approach to gather data from teachers and students would further the research available related to recruitment and retention of teachers and the impacts on school districts.

Limitations

I acknowledge there are several limitations present within a study of this type. I interviewed seven pairs of participants. Although I believe their experiences are relatable to others, I acknowledge there are circumstances and factors related to specific districts. In addition, all participant pairs are from public school districts in Minnesota. It is possible that perspectives

and experiences are different in other parts of the country. Another limitation could be that participants were interviewed in pairs. While this allowed for shared perspectives and the ability for participants to build upon each other's answers, it could also be seen as a limitation as they may have held back some thoughts and comments for fear of what their colleague may think. Next, I build on the implications and limitations to provide recommendations based on the case study.

Recommendations

It is evident that school districts must invest in teachers. The COVID-19 pandemic has taught us that we no longer can operate the same way we have in the past. It is time to review practices and determine ways to reinvent our approach. It is evident that the current practices are not working, and we must move forward with intention as school districts focus on strategies to address the challenges related to recruitment and retention of teachers. My recommendation expands on the themes that emerged from the participant interviews through the four frames outlined by Bolman and Deal (2017) which are depicted in quadrants: the structural frame, the human resources frame, the political frame and the symbolic frame. Through this lens, I will provide basic recommendations that all school districts must follow to intentionally focus on strategies for recruitment and retention of teachers through a systematic shift.

The structural frame outlined by Bolman and Deal (2017) focuses on the design of the organization which includes rules, roles, goals, policies and the environment. Administrators in the human resources departments must be well versed in the rules surrounding teacher requirements and licensure. Being able to provide alternative pathways to teacher licensure through formal and informal grow your own programs will help districts fill positions. This

process allows school districts to provide training to staff within these programs, so they are ready to teach children.

Bolman and Deal (2017) shared the human resource frame focuses on relationships, needs, and skills of people within the organization. School districts must utilize a variety of strategies to recruit and engage candidates, so they apply for open positions. School districts should share communication about potential openings in a variety of ways through social media platforms, website posting and word of mouth. In addition, intentionally sharing positive information and encouraging staff to do the same will draw focus to open positions within the district.

Having a consistent process for hiring and providing an efficient onboarding system for teacher candidates allows for more efficient hiring. Participants discussed the importance of building relationships with potential candidates from the start. Having a contact person within the human resources department who can answer all the questions potential candidates may have helps build this relationship. Intentionally building relationships with candidates at the beginning is crucial. Post-COVID-19, school districts must build these relationships in a variety of ways that includes attending job fairs, working with colleges and hosting student teachers. These avenues give school districts access to potential teacher candidates.

The political frame outlined by Bolman and Deal (2017) provides a frame to view the organization through power and conflict. The human resources department must be intentional when negotiating with teacher bargaining units. Teachers are looking for competitive salaries and benefit packages. An enticing salary and benefit package gives potential teacher candidates an incentive to apply to the school district. It is a competitive market. Districts must remain

competitive by offering benefits packages to teachers that include competitive salaries and benefits.

The last frame outlined by Bolman and Deal (2017) is the symbolic frame which provides a frame to view the organization that focuses on culture, meaning and rituals. Building a positive culture and working environment for staff, students and families will recruit and retain staff. Teachers want to work in a building where they feel supported and see students growing in their learning. As they work to build relationships with new teachers, schools are also focusing on providing support through professional development and mentorship programs.

Along with increasing strategies for recruiting teachers, districts are focused on retaining staff. Staff stay in districts when they feel like the district is focused on building a relationship and providing working conditions that are collaborative and positive. In addition, teachers need support through professional development opportunities. These opportunities should focus not only on classroom needs but also on mental health support for staff and students. The COVID-19 pandemic allowed teachers to re-evaluate their life goals and focus on a work-life balance. School districts need to focus on providing support for the health and well-being of staff.

Finally, a specific way to support newer teachers is providing a teacher mentorship program. The teaching and learning department must be intentional about providing support to new teachers. Expanding the mentorship program to include additional support for teachers in the classroom and the profession will allow for school districts to build capacity within their teaching staff to meet the needs of students. In addition to providing opportunities for new teachers, school districts must provide opportunities for veteran teachers to practice new required skills and grow in their learning as this will allow them to meet the needs of their students.

Conclusion

The impact of COVID-19 forever changed students, families, teachers, schools, and communities. Staffing challenges were present pre-COVID-19. These challenges are exacerbated post-COVID-19 as there is a lack of candidates applying for open positions. The impact of recruitment and retainment challenges school districts face has an impact on the workforce and will impact student learning if not addressed. This study gives school districts specific strategies to intentionally recruit and retain teachers in impactful ways.

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Appendix A



Completion Date 07-Feb-2021
Expiration Date 06-Feb-2025
Record ID 40641100

This is to certify that:

Julie Williams

Has completed the following CITI Program course:

Not valid for renewal of certification through CME.

Human Subjects Research (HSR)
(Curriculum Group)

Human Subjects Research Training: Social-Behavioral-Educational Researchers
(Course Learner Group)

1 - Basic Course
(Stage)

Under requirements set by:

University of St. Thomas - Minnesota

CITI
Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative

Appendix B

Dear _____,

My name is Julie Williams, and I am the Director of Student Support Services for Cambridge-Isanti Schools. In addition, I am a doctoral student at the University of St. Thomas. I am kindly requesting your participation in a doctoral research study that I am conducting titled: Teacher Recruitment and Retainment Challenges Post-COVID-19: A Case Study of K-12 School Districts. You were selected as a participant because your professional career and experience are relevant to the topic. Administrators in the human resources field of school districts or those with similar duties or knowledge of hiring practices, recruitment strategies, and retainment strategies will be invited to participate. In addition, from the same district, I will invite an administrator in the teaching and learning department to gain another perspective of district practices.

If you choose to participate, I will ask you to do the following things: participate in an interview session, conducted in pairs (with another person from your district) and individually, and participate in a focus group interview with other participants from Minnesota school districts. We will meet in a location that suits your convenience and/or virtually over Zoom.

If you would like to participate in the study, please read the Informed Consent letter below. After you have read the consent letter, please contact me via email or phone to share if you are interested.

Thank you for your time and participation. I can be reached at 612-868-7529 or jmwilliams@stthomas.edu.

Sincerely,

Julie Williams, Doctoral Candidate

University of St. Thomas

Appendix C

Consent Form

[Teacher Recruitment and Retainment Challenges Post-COVID-19: A Case Study of K-12 School Districts]

I am conducting a study about the challenges faced by school districts related to recruitment and retention of teachers and specifically, how that will change post-pandemic. You were selected as a possible participant because your professional career and experience are relevant to the topic. Administrators in the human resources field of school districts or those with similar duties or knowledge of hiring practices, recruitment strategies, and retainment strategies will be invited to participate. In addition, from the same district, I will invite an administrator in the teaching and learning department to gain another perspective of district practices. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by: Julie Williams, graduate student at the University of St. Thomas, under the guidance and direction of Dr. Aura Wharton-Beck, my dissertation chair and advisor, at the University of St. Thomas, St. Paul, Minnesota.

Background Information:

The purpose of my study is to examine the recruitment and retention strategies used by human resources professionals and teaching and learning departments in K-12 public education in Minnesota. School districts have become creative in approaches to filling vacant teacher positions and offering support to new teachers in order to retain, support, and assist teachers in growing professionally. Subsequently, the COVID-19 pandemic changed the art of teaching in many ways. The direct benefits you will receive for participating are that you will contribute to the body of knowledge and scholarship related to this topic. The insights gained from this study will allow human resources professionals to adjust and adapt their recruitment and retention practices for a post-COVID world.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following things: participate in an interview session, conducted in pairs (with another person from your district), and participate in a focus group interview with other participants from Minnesota school districts. We will meet in a location that suits your convenience and/or virtually over Zoom.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:

There are no direct benefits to you for participating. Having awareness of the topic and participating in the collaboration will lead to additional strategies they are able to explore.

Compensation: None**Confidentiality:**

The records of this study will be kept confidential. In any sort of report I publish, I will not include information that will make it possible to identify you in any way. The types of records I will create include all data collected for this research project which will be stored in a locked file in my home study. All archival photos collected will be scanned and stored on an external hard drive. This external hard drive will have a secure password for access. The types of records I will create include audio recordings, transcripts, and master lists. These records will be stored in a locked file cabinet in my home office.

I will have access to these records for 3 years after the study is completed, when they will be destroyed.

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following things: answer in your own words questions in a semi-structured interview that allows for divergence from the prepared script. I will record the interviews and transcribe them at a later time. I will take notes during the interview if necessary. I will keep your name and identity confidential by using pseudonyms for any names you use and events or anything else that might identify you. I will make your identity private prior to allowing anyone else access to the interview, including a transcriptionist. I will keep copies of your interviews in a secure storage location. They will be analyzed along with other interviews and data, coded and categorized for use in my dissertation.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the University of St. Thomas. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time. You may withdraw during the interview by stating to me that you no longer want to participate by contacting me verbally at 612-868-7529 or in writing at jmwilliams@stthomas.edu or by contacting the IRB office at 651-962-6038. Should you decide to withdraw I will not use any data collected from you in the study. You are also free to skip any questions I may ask.

Contacts and Questions

My name is Julie Williams. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact me at 612-868-7529 or Dr. Aura Wharton-Beck, University of St. Thomas, my advisor and dissertation chair, 612-978-7965. You may also contact the University of St. Thomas Institutional Review Board at 651-962-6038 with any questions or concerns.

You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information. I agree to be audio and/or videotaped during my interview. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I consent to participate in the study. I am at least 18 years of age.

Signature of Study Participant

Date

Print Name of Study Participant

Signature of Researcher

Date

Appendix D

Interview Protocol – Pairs

Principal Investigator: Julie Williams

Research Title: Teacher Recruitment and Retainment Challenges Post-COVID-19: A Case Study of K-12 School Districts

Semi-Structured Interview Questions

1. Please share your background and capacity in your position related to recruitment and retention of teachers in your district.
2. Please share the demographics and building/program make-up of your school district.
3. What challenges did your district face related to recruitment and retainment of pre-COVID teachers?
4. When teachers leave, what are their reasons for leaving?
5. When teachers leave, where are they going?
6. What strategies and programs did you implement to overcome the challenges?
7. What characteristics and skill sets did you look for in teacher candidates pre-COVID?
8. As we move through COVID and post-COVID, have your challenges related to recruitment and retention of teachers increased, decreased or stayed the same?
9. Have the strategies and programs you have used to approach the challenge different through COVID and post-COVID?
10. Has the skill set or characteristics you are looking for in teacher candidates changed as we move through COVID and post-COVID?
11. What future steps, strategies, and/or programs is your district considering using to overcome challenges related to recruitment and retention of teachers?

12. Does your district provide teachers with a mentoring program or other supports for new teachers? What does this look like?
13. What impacts does the mentoring program or other supports have on your ability to recruit and retain teachers? Pre-COVID and has this changed during/post-COVID?
14. What impacts do the working conditions in schools have on your ability to recruit and retain teachers? Pre-COVID and has this changed during/post-COVID?
15. What impacts does teacher compensation have on your ability to recruit and retain teachers? Pre-COVID and has this changed during/post-COVID?