

Walden University

College of Education and Human Sciences

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

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has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
and that any and all revisions required by
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Walden University
2023

Abstract

Exploring Teacher Turnover in Two High-Turnover Urban High Schools

by

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MPA, Walden University, 2014

BA, Spelman College, 2011

Project Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Walden University

December 2023

Abstract

Schools in the United States average an annual teacher turnover of 16%, with half of all teachers who change jobs also leaving the profession. This problem is important because high teacher turnover interrupts the development of pedagogical acumen among teachers, adversely affects student achievement, and diverts budget dollars that are needed elsewhere. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore teacher turnover in two urban high schools that had twice the national average of teacher turnover so that research-derived recommendations could be made to improve teacher retention.

Grounded in organizational development theory, appreciative inquiry was used to explore how the former teachers who no longer worked at the schools perceived teacher turnover, as well as gain their insights about how to mitigate teacher turnover within the two schools. An open-ended interview protocol guided interviews with a purposeful sample of 10 former high school teachers who taught for the district for one or more years before leaving. Thematic analysis of interview transcripts revealed that high turnover was related to psychologically challenging work environments. The themes of relevant professional development and mentoring opportunities were unpacked for mitigating high turnover. The study resulted in a policy recommendation that outlines improvements for professional development and a teacher mentoring program that could lead to more supportive work environments for teachers. The teaching profession, schools, and students will benefit from implementing research-derived recommendations to improve teacher retention. Positive social change accrues when teachers remain and thrive in their chosen profession.

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Dedication

I dedicate this research study to my husband, Dorian Myrickes, who has been very supportive and encouraging throughout my doctoral journey. My parents, Oliver, and Roxanne Rosario, for their encouraging words. My aunt, Dr. Sharon Rivers, for being the example I needed to complete the doctoral program. Finally, I dedicate this research paper to all the educators who fight every day to give students a high-quality education so they can thrive in the global and diverse world.

Acknowledgments

I would like to acknowledge my doctoral chair, Dr. Richard Hammett, who has been highly instrumental in my success in completing my doctoral studies. Dr. Hammett has helped me grow academically and always gave me helpful feedback that I could apply to my studies. I am forever grateful for his knowledge, expertise, and patience.

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Section 1: The Problem

The Local Problem

The problem is that many schools across Illinois are challenged with high teacher turnover. Historical data published by the Illinois State Board of Education (2018) indicated that in 1 school year, the district lost over 30% of its teachers, almost twice the national average of 16% (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). Historically, over half the district's teachers leave every 3 years (Illinois State Board of Education, 2018). Leadership is one factor that leads to teacher turnover. Principal leadership behaviors influence teachers' experiences and work lives, both positively and negatively (Liebowitz & Porter, 2019). In addition, principals play an essential role in establishing and maintaining schools' teaching and learning conditions (Liebowitz & Porter, 2019). Inadequate teacher preparation is another factor that affects teacher longevity in the teaching profession. For example, many teachers have reported feeling ill-prepared to handle behavioral situations in contemporary classrooms (Flower et al., 2017). Stress is identified as one cause for teachers to leave the profession. Many teachers have reported being unable to maintain positive thoughts due to the stress of their everyday teaching workload (Lee, 2019). If the issue of teacher turnover is not addressed locally, these schools will be unable to retain a significant number of teachers each year, and budget dollars will be disproportionately targeted at hiring new teachers.

Rationale

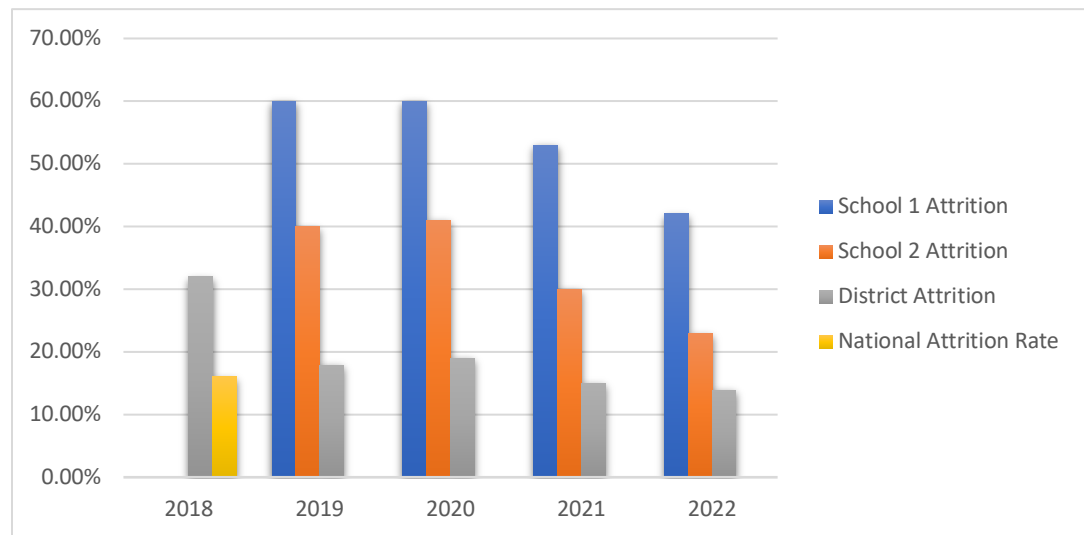
High teacher turnover in schools is a significant concern. As suggested by the national average teacher turnover rate of 16% (National Center for Education Statistics,

2018), the problem of teacher turnover is not just a local problem. High teacher turnover harms student performance over time, and schools are forced to re-route resources for hiring rather than allocating resources to improve the schools (Ronfeldt et al., 2013).

In 2018, the district lost over 30% of its teachers, almost twice the national average. Historically, over half the district's teachers leave every three years (Illinois State Board of Education, 2018). Figure 1 shows continuous high attrition for the two northcentral high schools in the same U.S. school district.

Figure 1

Teacher Attrition in Two Northcentral High Schools in the same U.S. District



Note. Date retrieved from <https://www.illinoisreportcard.com>

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore former teacher perceptions from two northcentral schools in the United States about the reasons that led to their

leaving those schools. I explored why teachers left their schools to make recommendations so that school districts can use them to retain teachers.

Definition of Terms

Job satisfaction: The employee's affective reaction to their work and the extent to which an employee likes or dislikes a job (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015).

Teacher attrition: Teachers who leave the teaching profession for reasons other than retirement (Kelchtermans, 2017).

Teacher retention: Teachers remaining with the original district with continued employment in the workforce of education (Borman & Dowling, 2008).

Teacher turnover: Teachers leaving the position to which they were assigned, whether voluntarily or involuntarily (Kamrath & Bradford, 2020). Teacher turnover has also been defined as the departure of teachers from their teaching profession (Ingersoll, 2003).

Significance of the Study

High teacher turnover interrupts the development of pedagogical acumen among teachers and diverts budgetary resources that could otherwise be used to enhance the instructional experiences for students (Ronfeldt et al., 2013). Furthermore, the systemic consequences of high teacher turnover harm school performance by contributing to poor student performance over time (Filges et al., 2018; Flower et al., 2017; Kohli, 2019; Liebowitz & Porter, 2019; Ronfeldt et al., 2013). The schools and their communities may implement my research-derived recommendations to improve teacher turnover and longevity. Positive social change accrues when teachers remain and thrive in their chosen profession.

Research Questions

In this research project, I used Borman and Dowling's (2008) theory of teacher attrition and retention and Cooperirider et al.'s (2008) appreciative inquiry to explore the phenomenon of teacher turnover. I used the following research questions to guide this study:

1. How do former Illinois high school teachers in a northcentral U.S. school district who have left perceive teacher turnover at their former schools?
2. What do former Illinois teachers in a northcentral U.S. school district who have left perceive as mediators of teacher turnover at their former schools?

Review of the Literature

Conceptual Framework

I used Borman and Dowling's (2008) grounded theory research to investigate factors associated with teacher turnover. In their meta-analysis of 34 studies on the moderators of teacher attrition in the United States, the researchers determined five factors related to teacher turnover. Those factors included (a) teacher personal characteristics; (b) teacher professional characteristics, like qualification; (c) school attributes, including organizational characteristics; (d) student body composition; and (e) school resources (Borman & Dowling, 2008).

Another theory that I used in this study was the organizational development theory, implemented through the appreciative inquiry (AI) lens (see Cooperrider et al., 2008). AI is used to systematically discover what works best while emphasizing the positive phenomena that contribute most to an organization's success (Cooperrider et al.,

2008). Emerging in the late 1980s, AI is used by organizations to adapt, evolve, and alter everyday practices and patterns creatively over time (Cooperrider et al., 2008). As early as 2008, AI evolved into a practical approach to change management and supported the positive transformation of organizations (Cooperrider et al., 2008).

To support positive social change within organizations, appreciative inquiry is not just used as a process-based method. AI is also used as a tool that bridges practice and theory to help individuals within organizations find new ways of working more productively together (Cooperrider et al., 2008). Cooperrider and Srivastva (1987) described AI as “more than a method or technique; it is a way of living with, being with, and directly participating in the varieties of social organizations we are compelled to study” (p. 131). Furthermore, appreciative inquiry is implemented through the five principles of (a) definition, (b) discovery, (c) dream, (d) design, and (e) delivery. These principles help organizations focus on values, accomplishments, and best practices, ultimately creating an encouraging and optimistic environment (Cooperrider et al., 2008). I used organizational development theory using AI to guide my study from conceptualization to project delivery. Table 1 presents an a priori alignment of the AI model that I used in this study.

Table 1

Alignment of Conceptual Framework and Research Component

| AI component | Research component |
|--------------------------|------------------------------|
| Definition and Discovery | Research Proposal |
| Dream and Design | Data Collection and Analysis |

Note. AI = Appreciative Inquiry.

AI is often used in education research. For example, according to Cooperrider et al. (2008), education stakeholders have widely used AI to implement new strategies to strengthen practices and reflect on improving schools' organizational and learning cultures. More recently, Calabrese (2015) described using AI in a study in which positive organizational change was encouraged among school administrators within a diverse school district. Calabrese (2015) sought to understand if changes would occur in practices, perceptions, and attitudes of staff members who observed each other and shared successful practices. Through AI, Calabrese (2015) facilitated interviews and focus groups that led to deep reflections to enhance the work that staff commits to in schools every day. Calabrese (2015) found that sharing successful practices in a group setting contributed to staff members committing to new practices to enhance their professional growth. Calabrese (2015) also found that attitudes and perceptions through the focus on the inquiry were positive, and staff members were invested in the transformative process of the organization. Additionally, the findings indicated that there is a need for educational leaders to undergo an AI process that will create spaces to reflect on practices and integrate more designs that will help schools positively evolve (Calabrese, 2015).

Based on recent education research in which researchers used a similar framework and approach, I used organizational development theory implemented through AI to investigate teacher turnover. I used AI to explore the perceptions of former teachers

about turnover in general and, more specifically, potential turnover mediators they perceived within their former schools.

Review of the Broader Problem

In this literature review, I summarize recent research on the topic of teacher turnover and discuss research-derived implications of teacher turnover and best practices in schools for improving teacher turnover. In my review of the literature, I included research reports, peer-reviewed articles, and books published that address teacher turnover and retention. I used the following databases: ProQuest Dissertation and Theses, Education Research Complete, SAGE, Google Scholar, and EBSCOhost. I used the following keywords for my search: *teacher retention, teacher motivation, teacher attrition, teacher turnover, job satisfaction, school culture, school leadership, education and appreciative inquiry, teacher experiences, and teacher longevity*. I also found recent statistical data and analyses on teacher turnover.

The shortage of teachers is challenging for school leaders, state lawmakers, and district leaders in the United States (Castro et al., 2018). One way this challenge manifests is with teachers in the United States exiting the teaching profession before retirement (Warrick, 2018). In the school district selected for my study, the issue is acute, with over 30% of the teachers leaving their jobs, doubling the national average of 16% (Illinois State Board of Education, 2018; National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). Historically, over half the district's teachers leave every 3 years (Illinois State Board of Education, 2018).

According to Abitabile (2020), teachers play a critical role in student's academic success. The high teacher turnover heavily contributes to low student performance on test scores yearly and negatively impacts teachers' relationships with students and leadership teams (Ronfeldt et al., 2013). When the morale of teachers and students declines, teacher turnover rates increase and result in the academic underperformance of students (Sorensen & Ladd, 2018). In addition to low morale, high teacher turnover causes the district to spend budget dollars on hiring new teachers. Hallam et al. (2012) reported that the United States spends more than \$7.3 billion to train, recruit, and hire new teachers. This is due to the increasing teacher attrition rates since 1989 (Hallam et al., 2012). The rates have risen by 50% (Rosenblatt et al., 2019). In 2024, it is projected that there will be an increase of more than three million students who will be enrolling in schools (Rosenblatt et al., 2019).

Additionally, 375,000 novice teachers will need to be hired to replenish teachers retiring or leaving the profession early in their teaching careers. The first 5 years are critical for new teachers because many leave the profession during this initial period (Overschelde et al., 2017). Replacing new teachers is expensive, and it diverts resources away from the educational needs of the students (Warrick, 2018).

While I focused on a specific school district in Illinois, teacher turnover is an educational challenge for schools globally. Developing countries such as South Africa and Afghanistan are facing similar issues related to teacher retention. Khawary and Ali (2015) reported that many teachers are underqualified in many developing countries to teach and do not have an environment to teach safely, resulting in teacher retention. For

example, the researchers reported that teachers do not have adequate resources to teach students, and when they receive an abundance of donated resources, it is not quality (Khawary & Ali, 2015). Using the global context to understand the factors contributing to teacher turnover indicates that this issue is not just exclusive to the United States. The global perspective confirms that other countries may also benefit from a study that seeks to determine best practices for teacher retention when teacher turnover is a severe problem locally. Teacher retention does not have a one-size-fits-all solution, and schools globally facing teacher shortages must work strategically to revise school plans to retain effective teachers (Holme et al., 2018).

School Leadership, Teacher Retention, and Teacher Turnover

One factor that leads to teacher turnover is principal leadership. Leadership affects the culture of the school and teachers' ability to teach (Baptiste, 2019) positively and effectively. Leadership also affects the ability of teachers to strengthen their skills and facilitate their success in the teaching profession. If teachers feel they cannot trust their principals and their caseloads are unbearable, they are less likely to succeed and remain at their schools (Pogodzinski et al., 2013). Liebowitz and Porter (2019) reported the meta-analysis results from 51 studies of the impact of principal behaviors on the outcomes of both teachers and students. Liebowitz and Porter (2019) concluded a relationship between principals' behaviors in schools and how those behaviors contribute directly to teacher well-being, student achievement, and teacher instructional practices.

Different leadership styles exhibited by the principals can affect the relationship between the teacher and the principal resulting in teacher retention. Ansley et al. (2019)

reported that school leaders who practiced a people-first leadership philosophy promoted feelings of being valued by teachers, which in turn, contributed to better job satisfaction for all teachers (Ansley et al., 2019). Teachers who feel valued, supported, and their voice heard by their leadership teams stay in the profession longer. It has been reported that 84% of teachers covet to be a part of any school decision-making process that directly impacts them by giving their opinions, suggestions, and thoughts. (Harris et al., 2019). The participation of teachers in the decision-making process at schools is an essential predictor of teacher retention and commitment to remain at their schools (Torres, 2019). If teachers do not have support from the administrative team, the tasks could be overwhelming, with teachers feeling less confident to teach their classes and being blamed for low student performance (Taylor, 2015).

The lack of support from leadership teams may be particularly evident in elementary schools and has been the focus of recent research. Elementary school teacher turnover in high-poverty urban environments was the focus of Kamrath and Bradford's (2020) research. The researchers found that 33% of teachers leave the profession in the first three years of teaching due to a lack of administrative support, teacher recognition, and relationships with colleagues (Kamrath & Bradford, 2020). The leadership behaviors of school leaders influence teachers' experiences, whether it is positive or negative.

Grissom and Bartanen (2019) focused on two principal strategic behaviors that impact teacher retention and turnover. The first strategy was principal behaviors that encourage low teacher turnover of high-performing teachers. The second strategy was related to principal behaviors that encourage high teacher turnover of low-performing

teachers. Principals strategically improved school performance by retaining high-performing teachers and encouraging poor-performing teachers to leave. If school leaders do not strategically select leadership styles, teachers are more likely to be unsatisfied with their jobs, which can result in leaving the profession (Grissom & Bartanen, 2019). Glazer (2018) suggested that school principals are best positioned to retain teachers because they can decide on working conditions (Glazer, 2018). When principals are effective at their schools, they better support both the academic achievement of students as well the retention of high-quality teachers (Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018).

The Role of Teacher Preparation

One external factor that influences teacher longevity is inadequate teacher preparation. Teachers' professional development is vital in enhancing teacher competencies (Apriliyanti, 2020). To retain teachers, professional development is essential for their overall growth so that teachers can have an aligned career path in the teaching profession (Smith & Smalley, 2018). Warrick (2018) reported that teachers felt unprepared to effectively do their jobs because school professional development has little connection to students. For example, many schools have no professional development aligned with student reading achievement, especially in elementary grades (Didion et al., 2019). In another study, there were reports of teachers being unprepared to manage behavioral situations that manifest in their classrooms (Flower et al., 2017). As a result, the researchers identified the need for teachers to learn more direct strategies and skills through professional development that go beyond basic classroom management to oversee behavioral challenges more appropriately. Flower et al. (2017) also emphasized

the need for more strategies around deescalating inappropriate behaviors displayed by students. These findings are important to the study because of their implications for improving job satisfaction when teachers can more adequately manage the behavioral challenges of young students. Teacher job satisfaction relates to retention (Flower et al., 2017).

In addition to being unprepared to handle behavioral situations, many teachers leave the profession due to not being prepared to handle diverse racial climates. Kohli (2019) focused on the inequality of teacher development for women of color veteran teachers. The researcher shared how the education programs left the teachers underprepared to manage the racial climate of many schools, a challenge that increased their risk of leaving the profession. An important finding from an AI perspective was that many teachers stayed in the profession longer due to teacher-led racial literacy development (Kohli, 2019). As a result, Kohli considered this professional development topic critical for better retention among teachers of color (Kohli, 2019).

Research-Derived Factors Related to Teacher Turnover

Teacher performance at the end of the school year also plays a role in teacher retention. Redding and Henry (2018) evaluated teacher turnover based on teacher performance and preparation programs completed and looked at the beginning, mid-, and end-of-year turnover. Higher-performing teachers were less likely to leave at the end or during the school year. Low-rated teachers who left during the school year were likely the result of teacher- or administrator-initiated exits (Redding & Henry, 2018). Related to teacher preparation through immediate support after hiring new teachers, school leaders

who invest in teacher support can improve teacher retention. Reitman and Karge (2019) focused on practices administrators can adopt to promote longevity in the teaching profession. The researchers focused on fundamental principles that included pedagogical knowledge, reflection, professional learning, mentoring, and teacher perception of professional competence to mitigate teacher turnover. Zhang and Zeller (2016) reported that schools are more likely to see higher staff retention results when the principals set high expectations and are highly engaged in the teacher's needs throughout the school year.

The Role of Stress and Stress Management

The literature also highlights teacher stress as an essential factor that adversely impacts teacher retention. Teaching is rated as one of the most stressful professions in the world (Saloviita & Pakarinen, 2021). Teachers' emotions are often triggered by their interactions with administrators and the policies and procedures they must follow daily (Blomberg & Knight, 2015). Additionally, the researchers noted that many novice teachers report that as the school year progresses, the communication between teachers and the principal declines, which causes teachers to be more stressed. Many teachers have reported the inability to focus on their profession because their stress levels are high. Aloe et al. (2014) reported that burnout from teachers is an issue that is most common among unmarried and young teachers in the world. Similarly, Lee (2019) reported quantitative research on the relationship between the three variables (a) teacher burnout, (b) emotional labor that reduces teacher burnout, and (c) retention. Emotional labor was operationalized as teachers learned to reframe negative thoughts that facilitated

better feelings and job longevity. These findings are important to the study because of their implications for improving stress management because these emotional skills are related to teacher retention (Lee, 2019).

The Organizational Climate in Schools

Adverse organizational and learning climates in schools can create stress for teachers. Research has shown that teachers in collaborative environments with their colleagues and who believe in the school's mission are less likely to be stressed and remain in the teaching profession (Webb, 2018). Castro et al. (2018) suggested that all school principals should focus on teacher retention using a lens of inclusivity to decrease unsupportive work environments (Castro et al., 2018). Solomonson et al. (2019) completed a case study of factors that influenced former agriculture teachers in Illinois to leave the profession. They concluded that teachers left the profession because they desired a more satisfying personal life, an incongruence with the principle of excellence in teaching, unrealized career expectations, and the need for a philosophical shift to a *more is not better* belief. Principal leadership teams need to be more intentional in creating school climates to help build teachers' capacity so all students can excel academically, and teachers can strengthen their skills to be effective in the teaching profession (Berkovich & Eyal, 2018).

Implications

High teacher turnover is an urgent concern at the local, state, and national levels. To retain teachers, it is critical to understand how to best support teachers through strategic professional development, leadership, and collaborative work environments that

contribute to their overall success within the teaching profession. The focus of this research is to explore teacher turnover in the two local schools experiencing high teacher turnover so that I can develop themes that can be used to make recommendations to help retain high-quality teachers. Based on my research findings, possible projects that may be suitable for this project study include a white paper policy recommendation that, if adopted, could formalize the thematic findings to improve teacher retention. Another project could be a professional development program designed to develop teacher personal characteristics, teacher professional characteristics, and school resources that have been shown to mitigate teacher turnover. Finally, a third possible project might combine these two project genres wherein a research-derived white paper supports professional development.

Summary

In Section 1, I have articulated the problem of high teacher turnover, the rationale for the research, and defined terms and research questions associated with the problem of this study. Additionally, I explored the significance of the study and the conceptual framework and included a review of the literature to connect the relevance of the study by identifying research-derived factors that lead to high teacher turnover in schools. Some of these key factors included school leadership, teacher preparation, stress, and the organizational climate. In Section 2, I will present the methodology, including the research design and approach. In Section 3, I will present the project, and in Section 4, I will present the reflection and conclusions of the study with recommendations on approaches on how to cease teacher turnover.

Section 2: The Methodology

Qualitative Research Design and Approach

High teacher turnover is an urgent concern globally and locally. I created two research questions to examine this phenomenon locally through the lenses of teacher attrition theory and AI. I sought to understand (a) how teachers who have left perceive teacher turnover at their former schools and (b) what teachers who have left perceive as mediators of teacher turnover at their former schools. A qualitative research approach was most appropriate for this project study.

By using the qualitative approach, I was able to interpret, analyze, and report the data about the perceptions that former teachers have about teacher attrition within their former schools based on their experiences. By using the qualitative approach, I was able to discover how to meet teacher needs, understand their perceptions, and reduce teacher turnover. I was able to use a basic qualitative design by examining my single source of data collection through interviews using an open-ended protocol. Through the interviews, I was able to gain a deeper understanding through conversations about teachers' perceptions of teacher turnover, as well as mediators of teacher turnover and effective support for teacher retention.

The research of Lincoln & Guba (1985) suggests that neither a quantitative nor a mixed-method design was appropriate for addressing the research questions of this project study because the nature of the study was to understand a phenomenon from the perspectives of participants who experienced that phenomenon. Quantitative research

allows researchers to focus on the collection of numerical, variable data and then use statistical analyses to determine causal or relational connections between variables (Creswell, 2014). By using the quantitative approach, I will not be able to explore the experiences of the former teachers through interviews. I will not be able to use the mixed-method design as well because it focuses on combining both approaches of quantitative and qualitative to answer research questions. Because the research questions were singularly about the perceptions of participants and included no variables to explore or examine, I was able to thoroughly research the problem in the local context while requiring me to thematically analyze the data to answer my research questions using qualitative techniques.

Participants

Researchers gain deeper understandings and meaningful insights when they are sampling purposefully (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). I used purposeful sampling to recruit teachers who have left their teaching positions to interview about teacher turnover. For this project study, the participants were 10 former high school teachers from two different schools within the same school district. I had a meaningful researcher-participant working relationship and the ability to capture the participant's perceptions of teacher turnover due to a small number of participants. The single criterion for participant selection was that teachers must have taught 1 full academic year or more at their former school. To gain access to the former teachers, I posted a research invitation flyer on social media platforms (Appendix C) that will include the criterion for participation as well as my contact information. The interviews were 45 minutes.

To ensure participants' rights were protected, I completed the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative program online course for protecting human participant rights in research. Participants were required to sign and return an informed consent form. Erickson (2012) noted the consent form reduced the risk of social harm as well as affirmed the respect and dignity of the participants in the study. Through the form, I was able to explain the rationale for the study, the expectations of participants, and their rights, including the right to withdraw from the study at any time for any reason without fear of reprisal. My plans for protecting the identity of participants were summarized in the informed consent form. For example, I coded all participants using Participant 1 (P1), Participant 2 (P2), etcetera and used those codes throughout my data analysis and reporting of results.

Currently, I am no longer in the education field. I do not work in the same schools or the same district as the participants in my study and, therefore, will not have supervisory responsibilities over potential participants. Because there are no existing relationships, Jelsma & Clow (2005) mentioned that ethical research is more likely because participants will be less likely to have felt coerced about their participation or guarded relative in their responses to questions. Because there were no existing relationships, it was important for me to establish rapport with the participants. I developed a positive and collegial researcher-participant relationship with all participants by establishing early communication with each one and by interacting with them before interviews, as necessary, using phone calls and emails. During my initial communications

with participants, I provided more information about the study and answered any questions or concerns about their participation in the study.

Data Collection

According to Erickson (2012), conducting research is paying attention to and reflecting on what you have seen and heard. I used the guidance of Ravitch and Carl (2019) to develop an interview protocol with semistructured, open-ended interview questions to assist in my data collection process. This data collection method was justified because of its effectiveness in accurately collecting the needed qualitative data from participants' perspectives. Through the interview data, I analyzed the experiences and perceptions of teachers who have left the schools and how their experiences were relevant to teacher retention and turnover. The interview protocol (Appendix B) contained interview questions that were aligned with my research questions. I was able to methodically organize the data collection process to better understand the experiences of teachers by utilizing the interview questions.

To construct my interview questions, I followed the advice of Ravitch and Carl (2019) to develop questions that will help answer my research questions related to teachers' behaviors, experiences, and opinions about teacher turnover at their former schools. Developed with consultations with my research committee, the interview protocol included probing and follow-up questions to ensure I captured the teachers' experiences in detail to fully answer the research questions.

I conducted open-ended interviews with the participants by phone for two reasons. First, people were still cautious about face-to-face meetings due to COVID-19.

Second, my research participants left their former schools and did not live in the area, complicating face-to-face meetings by distance. The interviews for each participant were 45 minutes. With the participants' permission, the interviews were audio-recorded using an audio recorder, and I had detailed notes about any impressions I had during the interview. I manually transcribed the interviews and used member checking to forward the summary of findings to participants for their review and to ensure their responses were not prejudiced by my biases. I was able to use the member-checking procedure to add accuracy to the data with the concepts of credibility, dependability, and transferability (Frey, 2018).

To keep track of my notes, I used a reflective journal. The journal was used so I could consistently reflect on and be aware of my assumptions, biases, and subjectivities, as well as unmask preconceived notions that emerge to add to the accuracy of my data analysis. According to Ortlipp (2008), it was imperative as a researcher that I engage in reflexivity activities to foster my opinions and awareness as I approach the teacher turnover phenomenon.

Data Analysis

As per the Walden University research checklist for qualitative project studies, EDD doctoral students must present their data analysis plan by describing how they intend to manage specific aspects of the data analysis process. In this section, I address my plan for coding and member-checking, as well as my plan for handling discrepant cases.

Data Coding

To examine the data closely, I manually transcribed the interviews and then read and re-read the transcribed interviews. As I read the interviews multiple times, I engaged in thematic data analysis to formulate codes. Once I developed the codes, I was able to use Ravitch & Carl (2019) approach to use the participants' data to generate themes and concepts related to the RQs and research problem.

Through the initial coding process, I used the Saldana (2016) approach to examine the data line-by-line to identify similarities and differences as well as highlight any information that should be guarded for its potential for identifying participants. After the initial coding process, I underwent a second coding process in which I grouped my initial codes into concepts, categories, and themes. To create the concepts, categories, and themes, I examined the data and looked for similarities and differences among the participants' responses, emotional language, as well as within-subject and between-subject repetition. I repeated this coding and analysis process until saturation was achieved. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), saturation is achieved when no new concepts, categories, or themes can be generated from continued readings. I was able to understand the shared and different beliefs, experiences, and perspectives of the participants through the thematic analysis.

Member Checking

I returned the transcript with initial codes back to each participant to verify that I accurately captured what was said from the participants' perspectives. I asked each member to add anything they would like to add through the member-checking process.

Through member checking, I was able to ensure the credibility and dependability of my findings. According to Tobin and Begley (2004), credibility is achieved when the researcher accurately represents the participants' views. To achieve credibility, participants were provided the transcripts of their responses and initial concepts and categories within three days of the interview and had one week to provide feedback. I used a participant validation form to assist participants in providing their feedback, a process that enhances my study's dependability. Dependability is enhanced when researchers take steps to increase logic, traceability, and documentation (Tobin & Begley, 2004).

Discrepant Cases

According to Maxwell (2009), a key component of ensuring validity in a research study is to analyze and search for discrepant data and negative cases. To avoid discrepant cases in the data, I ensured that I consistently and routinely engaged with the data. For example, I regularly examined my notes from my research journal and transcripts to ensure there were no discrepant cases in the data. According to Erickson (2012), discrepant cases are not leftovers in data analysis. Instead, they are legitimate perspectives that cannot be simply ignored. As the researcher, I identified the frequency of occurrences to distinguish between atypical and typical information in the data.

Data Analysis Results

After receiving IRB approval for my study (IRB Approval # 09-19-22-0396577), I collected data through interviews with 10 participants. The participants were former high school teachers from two northcentral U.S. school districts. To locate the former

teachers, I posted the approved research flyer in several education groups on social media, including Facebook and LinkedIn. The research flyer consists of details about the researcher, the purpose of the study, the procedures for the interview, sample questions, and contact information if they wanted to participate in the study. After receiving emails from interested former teachers, I sent consent forms using an email attachment, and each participant consented electronically.

The data analysis process immediately began after interviews with participants by manually transcribing the data. I was able to conduct a thorough and in-depth initial review of participants' responses to the interview questions. To ensure the credibility and dependability of the findings, I conducted member checking by sending each participant their transcribed interview using email and asked each of them to review and respond to me if their perceptions were conveyed incorrectly or if they had anything they wanted to add. All 10 participants responded that their transcript was correct. After receiving confirmation, I re-read all transcripts while listening to the interview recordings as needed to begin my in-depth thematic analysis.

I engaged in thematic data analysis through several coding processes by examining transcripts line-by-line to identify similarities and differences. I underwent this process until saturation was achieved, and there were no new themes that were revealed. Using the similarities and differences from the data, I was able to formulate categories using Ravitch and Carl's (2019) approach that developed into concepts and, eventually themes that were related to the RQs and research problem. No discrepant cases were identified. I consistently used reflective journaling to monitor my own biases,

subjectivities, and assumptions to enhance the credibility of my data analysis and results.

Table 2 represents the descriptive statistics for the 10 participants in my study.

Table 2*Participant Characteristics*

| Characteristic | (n) | % |
|------------------------|-----|----|
| Gender | | |
| Female | 7 | 70 |
| Male | 3 | 30 |
| Age | | |
| 18-24 | 0 | 0 |
| 25-34 | 5 | 50 |
| 35-44 | 3 | 30 |
| 45-54 | 2 | 20 |
| Over 55 | 0 | 0 |
| Ethnicity | | |
| African American | 7 | 70 |
| White | 2 | 20 |
| Hispanic or Latino | 1 | 10 |
| Asian/Pacific Islander | 0 | 0 |
| Other | 0 | 0 |
| Grade Level Taught | | |
| 9th | 3 | 30 |
| 10th | 2 | 20 |
| 11th | 3 | 30 |

| Characteristic | (<i>n</i>) | % |
|--------------------------|--------------|----|
| 12th | 2 | 20 |
| Subject | | |
| Math | 2 | 20 |
| Science | 1 | 10 |
| Social Studies | 1 | 10 |
| English/Language Arts | 5 | 50 |
| Other | 1 | 10 |
| Years of Teaching | | |
| < 1 year | 0 | 0 |
| 1-5 years | 0 | 0 |
| 5-10 years | 5 | 50 |
| 10-15 years | 3 | 30 |
| 15+ years | 2 | 20 |

Note. $N = 10$ participants. All teachers taught for one full academic year at their former school. The only special education teacher participant taught all subjects.

The following research questions guided my data analysis.

RQ1: How do former high school teachers in a northcentral US school district who have left perceive teacher turnover at their former schools?

RQ2: What do former high school teachers in a northcentral US school district who have left perceive as mediators of teacher turnover at their former schools?

My data analysis results are provided below for each RQ.

Results for RQ1: Former High School Teachers' Perceptions of Teacher Turnover at Their Former Schools

As I read the transcripts, I searched for similarities in participant responses that might be identified as categories that could then be logically combined to unpack themes (Saldana, 2016) about how the former teachers perceived teacher turnover at their former schools. As described below, I identified two related categories (a) *inconsistent administrative support* and (b) *organizational culture and climate*.

Category 1: Inconsistent Administrative Support

The first category that emerged from my thematic analysis was inconsistent administrative support. This category relates to how former teachers at the two northcentral high schools conveyed their experiences related to leadership from their administration teams that influenced their decisions to leave. They noted that teacher turnover was influenced by both a lack of strong administrative support and a lack of consistent administrative teams' presence at their schools. P7 stated, "our school had four principals in five years. There was no consistent vision or structure that gave teachers any support." P2 noted that, "our school had as many principals as we have had teachers." P6 reported that

The union between teachers and administration was very threatening and intimidating. Instead of the administrative team attempting to build teachers' capacity to make us stronger teachers, their help always came from a place of evaluation and consistently finding errors in our teaching.

The lack of presence led to inconsistent relationships between teachers and their administrators, which led to teachers feeling isolated and attempting to provide a school vision among themselves. The inconsistent relationships with administrators resulted in former teachers leaving their schools. P5 stated,

I left because I did not have a great relationship with the principal. The principal did not see any value in my teaching skills or any value in the extra-curricular program that I was leading for students. The principal did not respect me, and my input was never taken into consideration when the administrative team made decisions for the school. Administratively, it was not running well.

Unfortunately, when administrator involvement was noted as consistent, it was perceived as persistently negative. In this regard, P2 noted,

I left because teachers' evaluations were punitive. The feedback given by the administrative team was not supportive or transparent. The evaluations should be more of a conversation and allow the teacher to come to the table with their own evidence and ways to fix errors in their teaching versus the administrative team immediately telling teachers that they miss the mark and that they need to find another profession that brings them more success. This was very heartbreaking to hear, and as a teacher, I felt defeated, which resulted in me leaving the school.

Continuing in the vein of negative leadership, P1 stated, “teachers left our school because they had better opportunities to work with more positive administration teams. There was instability in our former administration team's ability to implement the international baccalaureate program for our students with fidelity.”

From these teacher reflections, I unpacked the inconsistent administrative support category related to teacher turnover among former teachers. Particularly in relation to P1 and P2's reflections, this category could have equally been characterized as negative leadership, but the category of inconsistent administrator support seemed to capture the broader group's sentiments more accurately.

Category 2: Organizational Culture and Climate

The second category that emerged from my thematic analysis was organizational culture and climate. The former teacher participants expressed how culture and climate played a significant role in teacher retention at their former schools, which led to many teachers not returning. P8 noted that administrative teams should have been more intentional about building the organizational culture of the school. P8 also noted that the administration teams did not care about teachers' development and well-being. In addition, P8 shared, "It didn't feel like a community, and I wanted a family-oriented atmosphere, but I did not receive that." P6 added that the administration team could have done a lot more to promote the organizational community of the school. P6 stated, "PDs [program directors] around community could have been helpful. The administration team could have done a better job of building personal and professional relationships with each teacher," which would also have bolstered a sense of community. The need for a stronger organizational culture leading to a sense of community was missing for these two teachers.

Some of the former teachers also expressed their concern about not having a culture that held students accountable for disruptive or adverse behavior, which led to

personal stress. P8 shared, “the culture and climate were very dissatisfying, as well as the inability to hold students accountable through a school-wide discipline system.” P8 added, “Teachers were unhappy about the climate and culture of the school and often felt unsafe to come to work due to students fighting.” P2 shared a similar experience, specifically with fighting in classrooms. P2 stated,

The first week of November of my first year, a student threw a chair in my classroom, and I was written up for negligence. I was disciplined for it, and the form that they had filled out to send downtown was five years old, and we had to call the union. The school wanted me to call the dean and security sooner when the student had an altercation the previous class period. I could not have called security any sooner.

The lack of school-wide discipline systems and holding students accountable for behavioral actions led to teacher stress, frustration, and in some cases, resulted in mental health challenges for teachers. P9 expressed a culture at her former school that was stressful, also using the word toxic to characterize the school environment. “Teachers had mental breakdowns in the lounge,” reported P9. Due to the culture and morale being low, she decided to leave without giving notice. P5 shared a similar sentiment relating that his school was not good for his mental health and that he did not feel fulfilled as a teacher based on how the school was running. P4 summed up the organizational and cultural challenges very well by sharing,

I got to a breaking point, and I think that’s how a lot of other teachers felt, especially new teachers. I would cry in the car on the way to work because it felt

like I was alone in a sea of 40 students who knew that they didn't have to listen to me. It was personally not sustainable. The day-to-day was so stressful.

The need to hold students more accountable for their behaviors, therefore, was an important subset of school culture that needed to be addressed for these former teachers, but inconsistent administrator support likely exacerbated the challenge of making substantive organizational or cultural changes within the schools.

The interview question that focused on teacher perceptions about teacher turnover was, "Please describe your perceptions of teacher retention at your former school." Guided by (Carlson, 2021), I formed nuanced impressions based on relevant participant responses in terms of positive, neutral, or negative responses. As shown in Table 2, seven of the participants noted that turnover was high or very high. Among those seven, the reasons given for the high turnover tended to be negative and focused on stressful work environments. Of the three former teachers who provided more neutral responses (P3, P4, and P6), P3 and P6 tended to provide the most neutral perceptions of teacher retention based on the selected interview snippets shown in the table. P4's reaction was more negative, however, noting that retention was not great for either teachers or administrators. My nuanced impression based on the summary of the teachers' relevant comments was that teacher perceptions of teacher turnover were negative overall and tended to be explained in terms of psychologically challenging work environments. One participant, P9, used the term *revolving door* to characterize teacher turnover at their former school, and I thought this term best captured a partial theme for RQ1.

Table 3*Participant Perceptions About Teacher Turnover*

| Participant | Summary of Relevant Comments | Nuanced Impressions |
|-------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| P1 | High turnover due to negative leadership. | Negative, psychologically challenging environment for teachers. |
| P2 | High turnover. Over a four-year period, more teachers left than the total number who worked there. | Negative, psychologically challenging environment for teachers. |
| P3 | Stable core group of teachers. Turnover higher in Math and Science departments. | Neutral. |
| P4 | Not great. A lot of turnovers of both teachers and administrators. | A little neutral tending toward negative. |
| P5 | There was an expectation that teachers would not stay because of what was going on there. | Negative, psychologically challenging environment for teachers. |
| P6 | There was low student enrollment. Not sure why some teachers left. Perhaps to pursue something different. | Neutral. |
| P7 | Students would ask teachers if they were planning to return after spring break. Normal for half the staff to be replaced by new employees. | Negative, psychologically challenging environment for teachers and staff. |
| P8 | Teacher retention was terrible. Teachers were unhappy. | Negative, psychologically challenging environment for teachers. |
| P9 | It was a revolving door. Complaints included need for administrative support, an environment that curtailed professional development and attainment of goals, a toxic culture, and sadness for both students and teachers. | Negative, psychologically challenging environment for students and teachers. |
| P10 | Teacher retention was not good. Stressful classroom caseloads, need for student discipline, lack of collaboration time with colleague teachers. | Negative, psychologically challenging environment for teachers. |

Combining these observations, the theme that best represented the first RQ for my research was the *revolving door due to psychologically challenging work environments*.

The contributing categories are inconsistent administrative support and organizational culture and climate.

Results for RQ2: Former High School Teachers' Perceptions of Mediators of Teacher Turnover at Their Former Schools

As I read the transcripts related to the interview questions for the second RQ, I continued the practice used for the first RQ of searching for similarities in participant responses that might be identified as categories that could then be logically combined to unpack themes (Saldana, 2016) about how the former teachers perceived mediators of teacher turnover at their former schools. After reading and reading the transcripts, however, no categories were identified, which resulted in directly unpacking the themes of *Professional Development* and *Teacher Mentorship*.

Theme 2: Professional Development

Although former teachers identified the causes of the reasons they left the schools, they also identified mediators to help administration teams retain teachers in the future. According to P3, teachers need time to spend with leadership teams in the building to form relationships, and leadership teams need to be more open to teachers' feedback. P3 added, "the relationship can build if administration teams give teachers more leadership roles in an effort for teacher feedback to be heard and to give more time for team leads and administration team to meet on a weekly basis." The collaboration between teachers and leadership teams could build fast if time is given throughout the week for professional development. Building relationships through professional development is crucial to retaining teachers.

Former teachers expressed how the lack of professional development and their inconsistent growth as a teacher influenced them to leave. P6 stated, “I left because I didn’t see any opportunities to grow as a professional. Even as a veteran teacher, I still valued opportunities to make my craft better, and unfortunately, there were no opportunities present at the school.” Teachers felt ill-prepared to effectively teach their classes because they had no designated time to enhance their skills as a teacher. Teachers indicated that some of their prep meetings were taken away to meet about nonrelated academic topics. For example, P9 noted that the principal called teacher meetings to often discuss behavior concerns at the school rather than scheduling meetings to enhance the growth of the staff. P7 indicated that teachers in the building started requesting their prep time to be geared towards professional development around curriculum design and lesson planning but were never given the opportunity to meet and learn from other teachers. Professional development was not a priority, and P3 mentioned that it was evident to all teachers.

To ensure teachers are giving students the best educational experience, they need opportunities to consistently grow their skill sets in the teaching profession. The former teachers have identified mediators that can help teachers remain at their schools. P2 and P5 noted that schools need meetings to understand how to implement the curriculum with fidelity. P2 noted that teachers spent more time trying to find curriculum materials on their own instead of meeting with other teachers to collaborate and share materials that could have been beneficial to all students. P3, P4, and P10 also expressed the need for curriculum planning at their former schools. The need for planning was emphasized to

better service the diverse learners in the school. P4 stated, “Everyone in the building can benefit from diverse learning professional development opportunities since 30% of the students were diverse learners at my former school. Every teacher must know how to best support their needs in the classroom.” The need for teachers to be successful in their profession requires professional development to strengthen their skill sets. These former teachers have identified professional development as influential in helping students have the best educational experience.

Theme 3: Teacher Mentorship

The third theme that emerged from the former teacher interviews was a desire to have teacher mentorship in schools. The former teachers expressed how a teacher mentoring program would have been beneficial to their growth as a teacher and their overall mental well-being. There were seven teachers (P1, P4, P5, P6, P8, P9, P10) who spoke about the significance of having a mentorship program in the school. For example, P1 shared,

It was dissatisfying not being able to work with another special education teacher just like me in the building. Because the case manager was not present all the time, I often relied on my own personal knowledge to make instructional decisions for the students. It would have been great to have a thought partner.

In addition to P1, P4 shared,

When I first started the school, I was the only science teacher. It was hard for me because I didn't have anyone whom I could ask for materials from or discuss

strategies for my classes. I even suggested to the leadership team to hire someone outside of the school for mentorship.

P5 and P6 also described how a mentorship program could have benefited teachers, specifically mentioning teachers in their first year of teaching. P5 stated,

There needs to be a mentorship program present at the school, so new teachers do not feel alone. New teachers need someone in the building to help them feel grounded and answer questions quickly to help them advance their teacher profession.

P6 also noted a need for mentorship amongst veteran and new teachers. P6 noted that, “Administration teams can better support new teachers by being intentional and pairing them with veteran teachers. This union would be less threatening and intimidating because it's coming from a place of building capacity and support.” P8, P9, and P10 shared similar perspectives with the other participants regarding mentoring. P9 mentioned that they would have stayed at the school longer if there had been professional development, specifically citing a teacher mentorship program where teachers could plan lessons and learn strategies from each other. The teachers’ responses were heavily weighted to support the need for teacher mentorship programs. Teacher mentorship was identified more frequently than any different theme as one of the reasons the teachers left their schools.

Summary

Data were collected for this project study from ten former teachers at two high schools in the northcentral US to answer the two research questions that dealt with (a)

how the teachers perceived teacher turnover and (b) mediators to teacher turnover. By exploring the former teachers' perspectives, I addressed the research questions on how teachers perceive teacher turnover and mediators of teacher turnover at their former schools. From the data results, one theme, *revolving door due to psychologically challenging work environments*, was identified for R1. Two themes, (a) professional development and (b) teacher mentorship, were identified for RQ2. Table 2 summarizes theme development by category. Note that for RQ2, the themes were unpacked directly from the transcripts without the benefit of category development. These themes were identified as reasons why former teachers left the school, as well as mediators to help retain teachers in the future. To help decrease teacher turnover at the two high schools in the northcentral US, I created a white paper with recommendations that are targeted for school leaders to improve the culture and climate of the schools through relationship building as well as a plan to encourage teacher mentorship. Through the collected data, I have learned how former teachers expressed the need for schools to build relationships with colleagues and administrative teams through professional development and the need to learn from other colleagues through mentorship to strengthen skills for the classroom. In Section 3, the project will be introduced, followed by purpose, goals, learning outcomes, project description and evaluation, review of literature, and social change implications.

Section 3: The Project

Introduction

For this study, I explored former teacher perceptions from two northcentral schools in the U.S. about the reasons that led to their leaving the schools. I learned that teachers left the schools due to a variety of reasons that were collectively unpacked as psychologically challenging work environments. The mediators identified by the former teachers were mentorship and professional development. I used the findings of this study to write a white paper for school leaders to help them create psychologically supportive work environments by strengthening relationships with teachers through professional development and a teacher mentorship program to strengthen skills for the classroom. This section will include the description and goals of the white paper, a literature review that connects to the proposed recommendations, the various ways that the white paper can be implemented in schools, and the implications of the project study.

Description and Goals

A white paper is the project deliverable for school leaders (see Appendix A). The findings from the research revealed that teachers left the schools due to psychologically challenging work environments. The results also suggested teachers desire to participate in a teacher mentorship program, as well as have personally meaningful professional development opportunities that would help them build relationships with administrative teams. Based on these findings, my goal was to (a) offer new and research-derived insights for school leaders about why teachers leave, (b) offer recommendations for implementing a teacher mentorship program modeled from best practices, and (c) provide

insights from the literature about how to create relevant professional development opportunities. School leaders are encouraged to apply the recommendations outlined in the white paper to develop and retain high-quality teachers in the future. Section 3 includes an overview of the project by introducing possible solutions within the educational context of the problem, providing a summary of my data analysis, recommendations from the study's findings, and current and relevant literature about white papers. This section concludes with specific recommendations for implementing a teacher mentorship program and how to best select relevant professional development opportunities.

Rationale

This project study was prompted by the problem that many schools are challenged with high teacher turnover. The problem was especially acute in two urban schools located in the northcentral U.S. This study was important because high teacher turnover interrupts the development of pedagogical acumen among teachers and wastes budget dollars. Grounded in the organizational development theory, I used the appreciative inquiry model to guide my study from conceptualization to project delivery based on data collection and findings. This process led to a white paper project. A white paper is often referred to as a position paper. White papers are known for offering recommendations for identified problems (Bala et al., 2018). Stakeholders use white papers to make more informed organizational decisions (Gotschall, 2015). I chose the white paper due to the study's findings that indicated the need for more supportive environments created by teacher mentorship and relevant professional development to build relationships with

administrative teams. Because no single mentorship or professional development program can address the needs of every school, I used DeWitt & Hammett's (2015) and Murray's (2001) recommendations that suggested a roadmap that schools can apply to their schools based on their unique needs.

Review of Literature

I reviewed the literature by searching databases such as ProQuest Central, Education Source, and ERIC through Walden University's library platform. I searched the literature with the following search terms: *white papers in education, teacher mentorship, professional development, challenging work environments, teacher experiences, school administrative support, and school climate and culture*. By reviewing the literature, I expanded my knowledge of the research findings and connected former teachers' perspectives to the literature associated with the themes for this project. In addition, I captured ideas from the research findings by utilizing the literature review. In the upcoming sections, I will present a scholarly discussion on the research related to the themes of the findings of this study.

School Culture and Climate

Culture and climate influence teachers' school satisfaction and mental well-being (Kang et al., 2022). School leadership teams play a crucial role in retaining teachers by understanding key factors contributing to teacher attrition (Babo & Petty, 2019; Farinde-Wu & Fitchett, 2018). Teachers thrive in supportive work environments. According to Sulit (2020), there is a connection between administrative leadership and teacher retention. Additionally, Scallon et al. (2021) noted that teacher turnover is influenced by

the principals' leadership styles and the culture they set for the school. Burkhauser (2017) reported that school principals' influencing style, when positive, makes the climate positive for teachers. Burkhauser (2017) also noted that school districts need to recruit school leaders who are passionate about creating working environments that are encouraging and positive to help foster an environment that is psychologically healthy for teachers.

According to Espinoza (2017), teachers remain in the teaching profession when they have school leadership teams who consistently create a positive and collaborative environment. Teachers thrive in environments that include mentors, recognition, appreciation, and growth opportunities (Olsen & Huang, 2019). To create these environments, school leaders should listen to teachers' concerns, seek their input on decisions consistently, and celebrate the successes of teachers throughout the school year. Maready (2018) concluded that a positive school climate results in satisfied teachers who stay in the profession longer.

Professional Development

Researchers have found that professional development for teachers is an initiative that improves systems in the world in educational settings (Perry & Bevins, 2019). To ensure teachers are successful in their profession, they need professional development through meaningful content that is effective and ongoing to strengthen their skill set for the classroom (Greenleaf et al., 2018). Teachers retain more information when professional development is presented consistently versus when professional development is rarely given in a year (Morgan & Bates, 2017; Sales et al., 2017).

Ottenbreit-Leftwich et al. (2020) and Love et al. (2020) noted that professional development in a workshop that occurs once could be more effective and help teachers. To design effective professional development for teachers, leadership teams need to evaluate the needs of the teachers (Prescott et al., 2018). Leadership teams should be intentional about the different needs of teachers for professional development based on their experience in the teaching profession (Bressman et al., 2018). To evaluate the needs, leadership teams should seek input directly from teachers (DeWitt & Hammett, 2015). Many teachers feel abused psychologically because they are not given a voice in the decision-making process at the school (Wronowski, 2018). The input from teachers helps school leaders make decisions about the agenda of the professional plans (DeWitt & Hammett, 2015). Garcia Torres (2019) and Sun and Xia (2018) affirmed that when teachers are included in decision-making for professional development at their schools, there is a positive impact on teachers feeling heard and satisfied in their profession. Researchers also noted that teacher autonomy and including their input in schools is crucial to helping the school succeed (Kouni et al., 2018; DeWitt & Hammett, 2015).

Varela (2012) noted that many professional development programs need more teacher input, which causes professional development not to be purposefully designed. The information from teachers helps build out a successful professional development plan. Leadership teams can garner teacher input in different ways, such as incorporating feedback sessions in weekly meetings or through surveys. Howell et al. (2021) experimented with teachers using their survey data to guide strategic professional development based on their strengths and weaknesses. The researchers found that

creating an effective plan for the teachers required both teachers' input and adequate time to make the professional plan. Researchers noted that leaders should consider the collaboration time allocated when creating professional development plans. Effective professional development plans include rich tasks for teachers to complete, a space for collaboration for teachers to construct new ideas, and engaging material (Biccard, 2019; Holmqvist, 2017). School leaders who intentionally create space for teachers to collaborate allow teachers to build their toolkits to increase student achievement (Wieczorek & Lear, 2018). By being intentional about the professional development plans, school leadership teams will increase teachers' effectiveness through meaningful and collaborative environments to retain teachers (Klassen & Kim, 2019).

Teacher Mentoring Program

One form of professional development is through teacher mentoring programs. Jacobson et al. (2020) noted that teachers need the support of other colleagues at their school to avoid feelings of isolation and exhaustion from the demanding teaching job. Teacher mentoring programs improve teachers' performance by allowing them to collaborate and learn from each other (Canos, 2018). In addition, mentor programs help teachers with effectiveness and improve retention and student achievement (Harmsen et al., 2019). In addition, Danielson (2019) noted that when teachers consistently work together in mentoring programs, they increase their opportunities to become more effective in strategies to get students engaged in the classroom. Teacher mentorship programs are recommended because they improve classroom quality (Schaap et al., 2019). If teachers do not receive support, the road to becoming effective is difficult

(Shanks et al., 2022). Lipscombe et al. (2020) discussed the importance of mentoring programs, the reasons they are recommended, and how the programs contribute to the development of expanding teachers' understanding and knowledge in collaborative teams within their specific grade level and subject. For teachers, especially novices, to thrive in the educational setting, they need to be prepared and supported through programs that will help their professional growth (Deng et al., 2021).

For teaching mentoring programs to be effective and set up correctly for leadership teams in educational settings, Murray (2001) provided vital models to implement the mentoring program effectively and promptly. Murray (2001) defined mentoring as “a deliberate pairing of a more skilled or experienced person with a lesser skilled or experienced one, with the agreed upon goal of having the less skilled person grow and develop specific competencies” (p. xiv). Murray (2001) suggested that the mentoring program in organizational settings should be implemented through the twelve steps of (a) identifying protégés, (b) developing diagnoses of protégés needs, (c) recruiting mentor candidates, (d) survey of mentor candidates, (e) selection of mentor candidates, (f) orientation and training for mentors, (g) orientation for protégés, (h) agreement negotiation, (i) execution of development plans, (j) periodic meetings, (k) reports to the program coordinator, and (l) conclusion of the agreement (Murray, 2001). Murray (2001) noted that when organizations focus on these critical steps, mentoring relationships thrive and allow participants to focus on effective coaching and supporting participants socially (Murray, 2001). The outline and key steps of the researchers can help retain more teachers by offering an effective teacher mentoring program.

Project Description

The project is a white paper based on the findings of this study targeted at school leaders. The purpose of the white paper is to present strategies and recommendations based on the research and findings of the study to develop high-quality teachers to reduce teacher turnover in schools. To successfully implement this project, there are potential barriers, needed resources, and existing supports that must be addressed.

Potential Resources and Existing Supports

I created a white paper for the intended audience of school leaders. The white paper contains the data and findings of the study along with key recommendations to the school leadership teams. Murray (2001) created specific checklists that are beneficial in implementing the twelve steps for mentoring outlined above. An existing support that will be helpful in schools is the top-level endorsement of the superintendent of the school district. While additional budgetary dollars may not be required for mentoring programs, providing time for teacher-mentoring pairs to meet and discuss challenges and successes is an important resource for mentoring programs. In addition, to the extent that outside professionals may be needed to provide professional development workshops identified by teachers, budgetary dollars will be required.

Potential Barriers

One of the recommendations from this project study includes professional development and resources to improve the culture and climate of the schools through relationship building while strengthening the toolkit of teachers to be successful in the classrooms. For professional development to be implemented successfully by the school

leaders, they will need the knowledge and training to create strategic plans, create professional development resources, and facilitate the professional development that would lead to change in the schools. To prepare school leadership teams, they may need professional development themselves. There will be a cost associated with providing the school leadership teams with professional development that could create a potential barrier to implementing this recommendation. Additionally, professional development for school leadership teams could be a consistent cost, and depending on the number of people on the school leadership team, this budget could be expensive. Lastly, some professional development for school leaders occurs when students are in school. If school leaders are out of the building when classes are in session, this could create a potential barrier and hardship for the community.

The second recommendation for this project study is establishing teacher mentorship programs in an effort for teachers to collaborate and learn from each other. To create the teacher mentorship program, teachers would need to be paired with another teacher in the building. Teachers are usually paired based on experience, grade level, and subject area. If the school is limited to teachers in the same grade level or subject area, this can limit the ability to pair each teacher in the building which could cause a potential barrier and threat to the program's success. One solution to mitigate this barrier would be to develop agreements with other schools for the identification of teacher mentors.

Proposal for Implementation and Timetable

To present this white paper to school leaders, it is vital to have a strategic plan. This plan includes providing the data results of this project study and presenting

recommendations to reduce teacher turnover based on the research findings. I plan to help leadership teams create a professional development plan for the academic school year to support teachers in an effort for them to have the toolkit to create meaningful content for their classrooms. Additionally, I plan to present a timetable for implementation that includes vital resources to the school leadership teams. When I meet with the school leadership teams, I will share the findings of the study, the study recommendations, and the projected time for each step for a successful mentoring program as well as solicit their input for the implementation of the plan. Table 6 is a projected timetable for implementation that includes helpful resources for school leaders.

Figure 2*Timetable for Implementation*

| Recommendation | Time Frame | Resource |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Determine the organization's readiness and conduct a readiness assessment | 3 weeks | Murray's (2001) readiness checklist that includes action steps that organizations should implement before they consider themselves ready for a mentoring program.* |
| Identify proteges and mentors | 2 weeks | Murray's (2001) checklist for both identifying and selecting proteges and mentors based on experience and developmental areas. * |
| Matching of proteges and mentors + developing mentor goals and plans | 2 weeks | Murray's (2001) sample development plan that mentors and proteges can complete together that includes action steps, target dates, and required resources. * |
| Execution of the mentoring program with the development plan | On-going | Developed by the mentor-pair. |
| Feedback sessions amongst mentors and proteges to discuss progress toward goals | On-going | Developed by the mentor-pair. |
| Conclude mentor and protégé agreement + evaluate the process through formative data | 2 weeks | Murray's (2001) formative assessment process that organizations can use to analyze data to determine the effectiveness of the mentoring program.* |

Note: These are public-access resources available in M. Murray's (2001) book, *Beyond the Myths and Magic of Mentoring: How to Facilitate an Effective Mentoring Program*.

Roles and Responsibilities of Students and Others

My role is the researcher. For this project study, I conducted the research, analyzed the research data, and compiled the data with key recommendations to the school leaders. I created the white paper, and I am responsible for presenting the recommendations based on the findings of the study to the school leadership teams at the

school district to improve teacher turnover. The school leadership teams also play an important role in this research study. Should the school leadership teams agree to meet with me and allow me to present the findings of the study, my additional role will be to create a plan with them to implement the recommendations presented in Appendix A. I deem this collaboration essential to the implementation of the research project contained in Appendix A.

Project Evaluation Plan

For this white paper, a formative evaluation will be used in this project study. This is the appropriate evaluation considering the purpose of the white paper is to identify problems and offer recommendations (Bala et al., 2018). A formative evaluation will help me gather and analyze feedback from school leaders and the teachers themselves about whether the project was implemented effectively and how the objectives may have been met. For example, formative evaluation for professional development will be needed both before (to canvas the teachers about their PD needs) and after the professional development (to determine whether the PD met those needs). For the mentoring program, formative evaluation is built in through the checklists (Murray, 2001). My plan is for the white paper to be presented to the leaders of the school district as well as the Board of Education, assuming I can be added to calendars for an audience. During the presentations, I would ask the school leaders if they have questions or need any information to be clarified that is unclear about the research or the findings of the study. At the end of the presentation, there will be a survey for school leaders to complete (see Appendix A). The survey will be used to gain feedback from the school leaders on the

recommendations in the white paper along with their action plan and feedback on how they are going to implement the recommendations at their schools in the district. The survey data will be analyzed, and the results will be shared with the superintendent and school leaders of the schools.

Project Implications

Social change is accrued in public education when teachers thrive and remain in the teaching profession. At the local level, this project study addressed high teacher turnover in two schools in the same district in the northcentral United States. The white paper revealed findings that indicated that for teachers to remain at their schools, they needed more positive work environments, professional development, and a teacher mentorship program. The findings in the research also indicated that with these solutions, school leaders would be able to decrease teacher turnover at their schools which leads to social change.

This project also creates social change in a larger context in the education profession. This study focused on a problem that many school districts around the world are currently facing with retaining teachers. My exploration of teachers for why they left their schools and their sharing of ways to mitigate teacher turnover may help schools with a concrete solution to help retain teachers in the future. Schools and their communities will benefit academically, socially, and economically when teachers thrive in their profession.

Conclusion

In this section, I described the white paper that will be shared with the leadership teams of the schools in the district, the relevant review of literature, the evaluation plan, and the implications for social change. The white paper was the appropriate project deliverable because it revealed the problem of the study, the results, and shared recommendations to help mitigate the problem. In Section 4, I reflected on the project's strengths and limitations, offered alternative approaches, and discussed my growth moving forward as a scholar-practitioner.

Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

Introduction

The project study deliverable is a white paper that focuses on vital recommendations to the school leadership teams based on the data and the findings of the study to reduce teacher turnover in schools. In this section, I present the project strengths and limitations, offer alternative approaches for key recommendations to address the project study problem differently to leadership teams, present a reflective analysis of my growth as a scholar-practitioner, and describe the potential impact and implications for social change. This section concludes with directions for future research recommendations.

Project Strengths and Limitations

Strengths

I identified that the global research problem for this project study was that schools around the world are challenged with high teacher turnover, and as identified in my data analysis at the local level, the challenge can result in a revolving door of teachers coming into and leaving schools. The problem was especially acute for two high-turnover urban schools in the same district in the northcentral U.S. One strength of this study is the white paper contained in Appendix A that offers specific research-derived recommendations to mitigate teacher turnover that came both from the literature and from the former teachers themselves. Two such recommendations dealt with specific actions that school leadership teams can take to (a) implement relevant professional development opportunities and (b) create sound teacher mentoring programs to decrease teacher turnover and improve the

culture and climate of the school. The teacher mentoring program outlined in the white paper is based on Murray's (2001) model that outlines key steps that school leaders should take to implement a successful mentoring program. In addition to the steps, the white paper also references specific checklists that school leaders should use during each step as well as a timetable for implementation. The checklists and timetable are beneficial resources for school leaders to implement easily without having to create new materials themselves.

Limitations

This investigation was limited to a basic qualitative design, meaning I collected data from only one source, the interviews with former teachers who had left their schools. No one would expect this population of participants to portray their experiences in self-critical ways, an assumption that was affirmed through the interviews. Reviewing historical records maintained by the schools that documented the teacher's performance from the perspectives of the school leaders would have added an additional data point and made the study more interesting. Accessing those records, however, would be difficult both from IRB approvals and direct researcher access perspectives. The white paper includes research-derived recommendations for school leaders. The recommendations consist of implementing a teacher mentoring program, providing teachers with meaningful content through professional development, and improving the overall school culture and climate. For the teacher mentoring program and professional development opportunities to be established at the schools with fidelity, it would require training for the school leaders for them to be effective facilitators of the programs. School leaders

would need time to plan the professional development opportunities, perhaps prepare with another school leader, and gather relevant participant handouts to accompany each learning session. Additionally, school leaders would need time to review action steps for teachers and be available to present in classrooms to see the plan be executed. This would require a lot of time on school leadership teams and if they are not available or do not plan accordingly, this could be a limitation.

Recommendations for Alternative Approaches

For this study, I interviewed 10 participants who were former teachers at the two schools. An alternative approach is to interview principals at the two schools to gain an administrative perspective on teacher turnover. Another alternative approach is to interview more teachers at each school to identify grade-level needs and concerns as it relates to teacher turnover. The more data that is presented to school leaders, the more strategic they can be in their planning to address teacher turnover.

The research-derived recommendations to school leaders in the white paper are Murray's (2011) process of implementing a mentoring program as well as a timetable that outlines the number of weeks it would take to complete each step. Instead of completing the steps in weeks, school leadership teams can use the plan and checklist and create a 3-day workshop for teachers at the beginning of the school year as professional development since schools are given more time at the start of the academic year. This would allow a better foundation for proteges and mentors because they would have more time to build a relationship as well as time to discuss goals for the school year. One problem with the 3-day workshop is the lack of school leaders available for the schools to

lead the training. A solution for the schools would be to hire additional workshop trainers to ensure each participant is given the necessary attention and time to ensure they receive quality professional development sessions.

Scholarship, Project Development, and Leadership and Change

Scholarship

As a scholar-practitioner, I have gained a plethora of insights during my doctoral program that have been beneficial to my development as an educator and a lifelong learner. I gained much knowledge through reading and applying scholarly literature to my study and learning different research practices that made me examine my study closely through different educational perspectives. This doctoral process has strengthened both my writing and research skills. I learned how to include more scholarly language and how to format my papers correctly. I am confident now in searching for literature, categorizing literature to identify themes, and identifying vital results. This process has given me resources to prepare educators globally to decrease teacher turnover in their schools.

Project Development

The white paper was the appropriate project deliverable based on the problem and findings of the study. The study sought to understand the perceptions and experiences of former teachers who left their schools in two northcentral high schools in the United States. The results of the study revealed that teachers left the schools due to work environments that were psychologically challenging for them. Based on the results of the study, two research-derived recommendations were offered to decrease teacher turnover.

The recommendations are a teacher mentoring program and relevant opportunities for professional development in the schools. Both recommendations are important for helping teachers strengthen their toolkits for the classrooms. The white paper provides key resources such as checklists that are beneficial for furthering the development of teachers.

Leadership and Change

I started this doctoral study in 2014 intending to create social change for educators globally. As a former teacher, I understand the responsibility of ensuring all students receive quality instruction and what it means to be physically present for them every year. As a former assistant principal, I understand the importance of not having a revolving door of teachers and how crucial professional development opportunities are to teachers' overall development in their profession. From both positions, I have learned what it means to be a leader and the responsibility for advocating for people, both students and teachers. Additionally, in those positions, I have learned that true leadership is not associated with the title of the job, but it is about the actions and influences through strong relationship building with colleagues that create the most social change. This doctoral study has given me a leadership opportunity to help school leaders globally decrease teacher turnover to create positive social change in the educational setting.

Reflection on the Importance of the Work

High teacher turnover has been a significant concern for many school leaders around the world. I believe that my project study will influence the two schools in the district in this study as well as schools around the world with the issue of teacher

turnover. During this project study, I learned that former teachers left the schools due to psychologically challenging work environments and they had a desire for a teacher mentoring program as well as more opportunities for professional development to build their toolkit for the classroom and their relationships with each other. Educators will benefit from this project study by reading this project white paper and identifying key resources they can implement in their schools. The key resources outlined in the white paper will help school leaders retain teachers. Social change occurs when teachers can remain in the teaching profession.

Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research

Implications

When school leaders create school environments that are meaningful, collaborative, and growth-oriented as opposed to psychologically challenging, then teachers can thrive and remain at their schools. The white paper was created in response to the issue of high teacher turnover. The findings of the project study revealed that, when implemented with fidelity, teachers benefit from relevant professional development opportunities and teacher mentorship programs. Not only do teachers benefit, but the school climate and culture benefit as well. Through these recommendations, teachers will have time dedicated to their professional development which will benefit students in classrooms.

Applications

For this project study, I identified the problem of high teacher turnover and the various reasons why former teachers left the school. In response to the problem, I

developed a white paper that identified research-derived recommendations for a teacher mentoring program and professional development opportunities. Students can benefit when their teachers remain at their schools and when teachers can strengthen their toolkit to better assist them academically in the classrooms. This project study was designed to help teachers remain in the teaching profession. Its findings and recommendations, including the project, are transferable to the extent that other contexts are like those presented herein.

Directions for Future Research

For future research after the implementation of the project, I would recommend investigating teachers' perceptions about the teacher mentoring program and the professional development opportunities, by investigating the knowledge and benefits claimed by the teacher participants in terms of strengthening their toolkit for the classroom. Another approach would be to invoke pre- and post-test design-based learning outcomes for the students before and after professional development to determine if the opportunities were beneficial to the student's academic trajectory. Adding a mixed-methods element that would include both student and teacher perspectives about changes in classroom instruction would also be good. School leaders can benefit from this project study by understanding how to decrease teacher turnover, implement key recommendations, and provide an environment that is psychologically conducive to a strong school culture and climate. Positive social change accrues when teachers remain and thrive in their chosen profession.

Conclusion

This project study can contribute to school districts that are challenged with the issue of high teacher turnover by allowing them to create positive work environments that would yield a strong culture and climate for teachers. When teachers are in this environment, they tend to stay longer at their schools and in the teaching profession. Teachers provide the necessary skills and learning opportunities for students to be successful both inside of the classrooms and beyond. Therefore, it is essential to retain teachers each year. For this project study based on the results, I created a white paper that outlines two research-derived recommendations to help school leaders provide a teacher mentoring program as well as professional development opportunities. The recommendations are presented along with resources that school leaders can utilize in their schools. By engaging in professional development opportunities, school leaders would be able to build a strong culture and climate as well and teachers would remain in their profession and gain skills to be more efficient in the classrooms to enhance the academic journeys of their students and communities.

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Appendix A: The Project



Mitigating Teacher Turnover in two High Turnover Urban Schools

By Shika L. Myrickes

Executive Summary

Schools around the world are challenged by the revolving door of teacher turnover. This problem was acute for a school district in the northcentral United States. Archival data published by the Illinois State Board of Education (2018) indicated that in one school year, the district lost over 30% of its teachers, almost twice the national average of 16% (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). Historically, over half the district's teachers leave every three years (Illinois State Board of Education, 2018). This white paper was developed based on doctoral research that included in-depth interviews with some of the teachers who had left their schools. After a brief introduction and discussion of the research, the white paper outlines the development of mentoring and professional development programs that emerged as two important themes from the data analysis that were suggested by the former teachers as measures to help mitigate the problem. The goal of this white paper is to provide school and district leadership with a research-derived glimpse of the problem and solutions from the perspectives of teachers who had left. Because they were former teachers, they had no reason not to be candid during the interviews.

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Introduction

High teacher turnover is a significant concern across many school districts around the world. This problem is especially acute for an urban school district in the northcentral United States. The goal of this white paper is to present the findings of the study and offer new and research-derived insights for school leaders about why teachers leave and offer recommendations for implementing a teacher mentorship program and suggest ways to create relevant professional development opportunities in schools. These recommendations can help school leaders create psychologically supportive work environments by strengthening relationships with teachers through professional development and a teacher mentorship program to strengthen skills for the classroom.

Background of Existing Problem

The problem is that many schools across the state are challenged with high teacher turnover. Historical data published by the Illinois State Board of Education (2018) indicated that in one school year, the district lost over 30% of its teachers, almost twice the national average of 16% (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). Historically, over half the district's teachers leave every three years (Illinois State Board of Education, 2018). Research showed that leadership, stress, and inadequate teacher preparation were all factors that led to teachers leaving the profession (Flower et al., 2017; Liebowitz & Porter, 2019). Throughout this research study, I sought to understand the various reasons why former teachers left the schools based on their experiences and perceptions of teacher turnover at their schools.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of Borman and Dowling's (2008) theory of teacher retention and Cooperrider et al.'s appreciative inquiry model for organizational development guided my research that led to the development of this white paper. Borman and Dowling (2008) contributed to the framework for investigating factors associated with teacher turnover. In their meta-analysis of 34 studies on the moderators of teacher attrition in the United States, the researchers determined five factors related to teacher turnover. Those factors included (a) teacher personal characteristics, (b) teacher professional characteristics (i.e., qualifications), (c) school attributes, including organizational characteristics, (d) student body composition; and (e) school resources (Borman & Dowling, 2008).

The research study was also guided by organizational development theory, implemented through appreciative inquiry (AI) (Cooperrider et al., 2008). AI is used as a tool that bridges practice and theory to help individuals within organizations find new ways of working more productively together (Cooperrider et al., 2008). AI is implemented through the five principles of (a) definition, (b) discovery, (c) dream, (d) design, and (e) delivery. These principles help organizations focus on values, accomplishments, and best practices, ultimately creating an encouraging and optimistic environment (Cooperrider et al., 2008). AI guided my study from conceptualization to project delivery. Table 1 presents an a-priori alignment of the AI model that played a significant role in the components of the study.

Table 1*Alignment of Conceptual Framework and Research Component*

| AI component | Research component |
|--------------------------|------------------------------|
| Definition and Discovery | Research Proposal |
| Dream and Design | Data Collection and Analysis |
| Design and Delivery | Research Project Deliverable |

Note. AI = Appreciative Inquiry.

Research Design

I used a basic qualitative approach design to explore former teachers' perceptions and their experiences related to teacher turnover at their former schools. This approach allowed the researcher to gain perspectives from former teachers about teacher turnover as well as gain an understanding of their views on mediators and how to effectively support teacher retention. The former teachers' experiences were captured through an open-ended interview question protocol. Data were collected through interviews with 10 participants. The participants were former high school teachers from two northcentral US school districts. To locate the former teachers, I posted an approved research flyer in several education groups on social media, including Facebook and LinkedIn. After receiving emails from interested former teachers, I sent consent forms using an email attachment, and each participant consented electronically. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed for the qualitative data analysis. Table 2 represents the descriptive statistics for the 10 participants in the study.

Table 2*Demographics Characteristic of Participants*

| Characteristic | (n) | % |
|---------------------------|-----|----|
| Gender | | |
| Female | 7 | 70 |
| Male | 3 | 30 |
| Age | | |
| 18-24 | 0 | 0 |
| 25-34 | 5 | 50 |
| 35-44 | 3 | 30 |
| 45-54 | 2 | 20 |
| Over 55 | 0 | 0 |
| Ethnicity | | |
| African American | 7 | 70 |
| White | 2 | 20 |
| Hispanic or Latino | 1 | 10 |
| Grade Level Taught | | |
| 9th | 3 | 30 |
| 10th | 2 | 20 |
| 11th | 3 | 30 |
| 12th | 2 | 20 |

| Baseline characteristic | (n) | % |
|-------------------------|-----|----|
| Subject | | |
| Math | 2 | 20 |
| Science | 1 | 10 |
| Social Studies | 1 | 10 |
| English/Language Arts | 5 | 50 |
| Other | 1 | 10 |
| Years of Teaching | | |
| < 1 – 5 years | 0 | 0 |
| 5-10 years | 5 | 50 |
| 10-15 years | 3 | 30 |
| 15+ years | 2 | 20 |

Note. $N = 10$ participants. There was only one special education teacher participant who taught all subjects.

Data Analysis Results

Two research questions guided the study. RQ1 sought to understand how former teachers who had left the school district perceived teacher turnover at their schools. RQ2 sought to understand what the former teachers perceived as would be mediators of teacher turnover. From the data analysis results, one theme, *revolving door due to psychologically challenging work environments*, was identified for RQ1. For RQ2, the two themes of (a) professional development and (b) teacher mentorship were unpacked as mediators to slow the revolving door of teacher turnover for RQ2.

Theme 1: Revolving door due to psychologically challenging work environments. The psychologically challenging work environments manifested a lack of administrative support, difficult organizational cultures, and negative climates. Teachers mentioned that there was no consistent structure that gave them support and the lack of relationships with leadership teams often led to them feeling isolated. Some reported that teachers sometimes attempted to develop and implement a positive vision for themselves and their students, but these attempts failed due to lack of support. Below are observations of responses from participants related to RQ1.

Participant Perceptions About Teacher Turnover

| Participant | Summary of Relevant Comments | Nuanced Impressions |
|-------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|
| P1 | High turnover due to negative leadership. | Negative, psychologically challenging environment for teachers. |
| P2 | High turnover. Over a four-year period, more teachers left than the total number who worked there. | Negative, psychologically challenging environment for teachers. |
| P3 | Stable core group of teachers. Turnover higher in Math and Science departments. | Neutral. |
| P4 | Not great. A lot of turnover of both teachers and administrators. | A little neutral tending toward negative. |
| P5 | There was an expectation that teachers would not stay because of what was going on there. | Negative, psychologically challenging environment for teachers. |
| P6 | There was low student enrollment. Not sure why some teachers left. Perhaps to pursue something different. | Neutral. |
| P7 | Students would ask teachers if they were planning to return after spring break. It was normal for half the staff to be replaced by | Negative, psychologically challenging environment for |

| | | |
|-----|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| | new employees. | teachers and staff. |
| P8 | Teacher retention was terrible. Teachers were unhappy. | Negative, psychologically challenging environment for teachers. |
| P9 | It was a revolving door. Complaints included need for administrative support, an environment that curtailed professional development and attainment of goals, a toxic culture, and sadness for both students and teachers. | Negative, psychologically challenging environment for students and teachers. |
| P10 | Teacher retention was not good. Stressful classroom caseloads, need for student discipline, lack of collaboration time with colleague teachers. | Negative, psychologically challenging environment for teachers. |

Theme 2: Professional development. Data from the interviews showed that teachers lacked the professional development in their schools to be successful in their classrooms. Teachers mentioned that they chose to leave the schools because there were no opportunities to grow as a teacher nor was there any designated time built into the schedule for them to enhance their toolkit as a teacher. In addition, teachers identified professional development as influential in helping students have the best educational experience.

Theme 3: Teacher mentorship program. The interview data showed the need for teachers to collaborate and learn from each other to strengthen their skills in the teaching profession. The former teachers mentioned how a mentoring program would be beneficial to their growth and overall well-being as a teacher. They wanted the opportunity to be paired with a teacher in schools with the same subject area and grade level. The lack of a

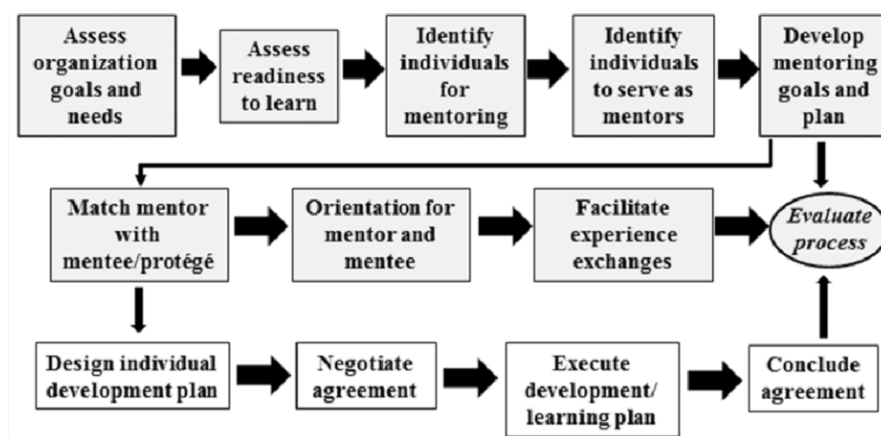
teacher mentor was identified more frequently than any other theme as one of the reasons the teachers had left their schools.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the recommendations below were made for school leaders to help them improve the culture and climate of schools through relationship building and professional development through teacher mentorship.

- Provide professional development training that focuses on improving the systems in the schools to help build a positive culture and climate (Perry & Bevins, 2019).
- Provide professional development through meaningful content (Greenleaf et al., 2018; Morgan & Bates, 2017).
- To find meaningful content for professional development, seek feedback from teachers about topics of interest so the time spent can be effective and intentional based on teachers' needs and growth areas to better support student achievement (DeWitt & Hammett, 2015; Wronowski, 2018)
- Create a teacher mentorship program utilizing the Murray model to ensure the program is effective in improving teacher performance by allowing teachers to learn directly from their peers (Canos, 2018; Danielson, 2019; Murray, 2001).

Murray (2001) provided a model that every organization should use to implement a successful facilitated mentoring program. Figure 2 captures the essential steps for creating the program. I will discuss the steps in more detail following the diagram.

Figure 3*The Process Of Implementing a Facilitated Mentoring Plan*

Note. Included with M. Murray's permission.

Step 1: Conduct a readiness assessment by gathering a list of goals and needs. This step assesses whether the environment is ready for a mentoring program and the level of commitment from the participants. This step also analyzes if there is adequate support from within the organization for the development of the program and how the program would align with the participants' growth needs and how to assess the overall performance of the program (Murray, 2001). According to Murray (2001), focus groups and individual interviews are conducted with administrators or executives of the organization to determine if the organization is ready for and committed to the program. Murray (2001) outlines a readiness assessment checklist that helps organizations determine their readiness to engage in mentoring programs.

Step 2/3: The second and third steps are to identify proteges and mentors, respectively. Organizations identify the priority participants who can benefit from the mentoring program as a protégé and who have the skillset and knowledge to be a mentor. According

to Murray (2001), a successful mentor has both commitment and competence characteristics and they are willing to help another person grow in their profession. In addition, Murray (2001) recommends that organizations find mentors who have strong interpersonal skills, knowledge of the organization, technical competence, status and prestige, personal power, the ability to share credit, and patience in risky situations. To be a protégé or mentor, one can be nominated by a supervisor, volunteer at their own will, or compete through testing and a selection application process (Murray, 2001). Murray (2001) suggests that organizations use a simple form for both nominations and volunteers to match the mentor's expertise and experience with the developmental growth areas of the protégés. The simple form asks for vital information such as interest in the program, growth, and expertise of each participant, the amount of time that individuals can commit to the mentoring program, and the specific type of mentoring relationship that everyone would need throughout the program. Murray (2001) recommends a checklist that organizations should utilize to match mentors and proteges through a seamless process.

Step 4: The fourth step is developing the mentoring goals and plan. In this step, the mentoring outcomes are recorded, and an actionable timeline is created to implement the plan successfully. As Step 4 concludes, the process should be evaluated, and adjustments made where needed.

Step 5: In this step, mentors and proteges are initially matched. During the matching process, there are factors taken into consideration such as knowledge, skills, and growth areas to ensure the mentor can provide the protégé the growth experiences to build their

skills toolkit. Murray (2001) also suggested that during the matching process, personality and compatibility of styles are also taken into consideration.

Step 6: An orientation for proteges and mentors is conducted. Goals for the orientation include that all participants understand their roles, the actionable plan, the goals of the mentorship program, time commitments, and establish the initial mentor-protégé relationships. Murray (2001) noted that this step can also include a practice coaching session that includes feedback on career planning for the proteges from the mentor.

Once the pairs have been matched and orientation completed, the pairs work together more autonomously with the organization supporting the process and monitoring for areas that need attention. The mentor and protégé work together to design a development plan for the mentee. The mentor and protégé draft a plan together listing actionable steps they will take together to reach their protege's goals. The next step is negotiating an agreement. This is a written agreement between both parties that outlines the frequency of meetings, the duration of the mentoring program, the amount of time for mentoring activities, and the role of the mentor (Murray, 2001). The mentoring agreement is negotiated and renegotiated as necessary to keep the relationship on task for fulfilling the mentee's goals. Finally, the mentoring agreement is executed, with both parties working through the plan as a team. The organization must facilitate experience exchanges where the proteges and mentors meet to discuss progress toward goals, support needed to meet goals, and report on the execution of the plan. The next step is to conclude the agreement. During this step, both parties discuss if learning goals were met and if any party wishes to conclude the mentoring relationship.

Mentoring programs are not necessarily designed to last forever. Once the goals of the mentoring program have been reached, then the mentoring program can either be retired or new goals identified for its continuation. Upon conclusion, everyone involved in the program meets for the program's final evaluation. Reflect to identify gaps that should be addressed in future programs, the overall success of the program, and if the program goals were met. Both formative and summative data are collected for measures of evaluation of the mentoring program, so the generation of data should be addressed in the creation of the mentoring agreements. The data collected is used to evaluate the effectiveness of the program and to fix gaps (Murray, 2001). Table 3 outlines a projected plan for implementation including resources for organization leaders.

Table 3

Timetable for Implementation

| Recommendation | Time Frame | Resource |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Determine the organization's readiness and conduct a readiness assessment | 3 weeks | Murray's (2001) readiness checklist that includes action steps that organizations should implement before they considered themselves ready for a mentoring program.* |
| Identify proteges and mentors | 2 weeks | Murray's (2001) checklist for both identifying and selecting proteges and mentors based on experience and developmental areas. * |
| Matching of proteges and mentors + developing mentor goals and plans | 2 weeks | Murray's (2001) sample development plan that mentors and proteges can |

| | | |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| | | complete together that includes action steps, target dates, and required resources. * |
| Execution of the mentoring program with the development plan | On-going | Developed by the mentor-pair. |
| Feedback sessions amongst mentors and proteges to discuss progress toward goals | On-going | Developed by the mentor-pair. |
| Conclude mentor and protégé agreement + evaluate the process through formative data | 2 weeks | Murray's (2001) formative assessment process that organizations can use to analyze data to determine the effectiveness of the mentoring program.* |

Note: These are public-access resources available in M. Murray's (2001) book, *Beyond the Myths and Magic of Mentoring: How to Facilitate an Effective Mentoring Program*.

Conclusion

The goal of this white paper was to present the findings of this research study and provide specific recommendations for school leaders to help them create psychologically supportive work environments by strengthening relationships with teachers through professional development and a teacher mentorship program to strengthen skills for the classroom. This study is significant because it provided vital insights to understand the experiences of the former teachers that led them to leave the schools. School leaders and their communities can benefit from the exploration of teacher turnover by implementing research-derived recommendations to improve teacher turnover and longevity. Positive social change occurs when teachers can thrive and remain in the teaching profession.

Presentation Evaluation Form

1. What new knowledge did you gain after reviewing the information presented in the white paper?
2. What recommendation (s) presented in the white paper resonated with you the most?
3. In your current role, how would you apply the knowledge and the recommendations that you have learned to help decrease teacher turnover at your school?
4. Which resource would you be interested in learning more about for this upcoming school year?
5. List 2 action steps that will be taken as a result of this presentation.
6. Provide any feedback or additional questions to improve this presentation for future participants.

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Appendix B: Interview Protocol & Questions

Date: _____ Start Time: _____ End Time: _____

Researcher: _____

Interviewee: _____

Pre-Interview/Introduction:

1. Welcome and thank the interviewee for taking the time to participate in the doctoral study.
2. Review the study rationale and purpose, data collection process, and review how identity will be protected and confidential.
3. Inform the interviewee that the interview will be audio recorded to ensure an accurate record and obtain the interviewee's permission for recording.
4. Inform the participant that the interview will not exceed 45 minutes.
5. Clarify anything for the interviewee before the start of the interview.

Interview Questions:

1. Please describe your perceptions of teacher retention at your former school.
2. Share your perceptions about your former school that influenced you to leave.
3. What could have been done differently to influence you to stay at your former school?
4. What are some recommendations you would suggest to the administrative staff to retain teachers at your former school?
5. What about the school was satisfying based on your experiences?
6. What about the school was dissatisfying based on your experiences?
7. What is one thing that your former school leadership team could have provided you with that would have made you feel more encouraged to stay at your former school?
8. What professional development opportunities would have been beneficial and perhaps influenced your stay?
9. What professional development opportunities have you had that influenced your decision to leave?
10. What support would have been important in your decision to remain teaching at your former school?
11. Give an example of something that happened that made you feel less satisfied about what you did as a teacher.
12. Please share an example of something you did that made you feel satisfaction or pride at your former school.
13. Give an example of something that happened that made you feel more satisfied with what you did as a teacher.

14. Is there anything you would like to add or share that has not already been discussed?

Post-Interview

1. Thank the interviewees for their participation.
2. Inform the interviewee that the researcher will contact them to check the transcript after the data has been transcribed.

Appendix C: Sample Printed Flyer

The interview study seeks former teachers who have taught one year or more at their former school for an entire school year.

This study aims to explore teacher turnover in schools so that research-derived recommendations can be made to improve teacher retention and longevity. For this study, you are invited to describe your exit or turnover experiences.

About the study:

- One 45-minute phone interview will be audio recorded.
- To protect your privacy, the published study would use codes for names.

Volunteers must meet the following requirements:

- Taught one year or more at their former school for an entire school year.

This interview is part of the doctoral study of Shika Myrickes, an Ed.D student at Walden University. Interviews will take place in September 2022.

To confidentially volunteer, contact Shika Myrickes at Shika.Myrickes@waldenu.edu