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SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS' EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING AND WORK-RELATED STRESSORS IN THE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

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by

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to the individuals challenging themselves and stepping out of their comfort zone, doing something you never thought you'd be able to do.

ABSTRACT

There is little to no research regarding novice elementary special education teachers (SETs) and their emotional well-being while in the school environment. The goal of this work is to illuminate special education teacher's voices missing in previous research. Additionally, this research examines the impact of work-related stressors on novice elementary SETs' emotional well-being in the school environment. The theoretical perspective of heuristics is used to illuminate a problem or answer a question about the lived experience of the researcher. Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) transactional theory of stress and coping framework guided the research question development, data analysis, and presentation of findings. Data was collected through a one time virtual interview with each participant as well as four weekly digital reflective journals completed by each participant. Data stored in Dedoose was thematically coded and environmentally triangulated. Findings indicated that SETs experience unique work-related stressors that can negatively influence emotional well-being. Work-related stressors identified by participants consisted of administrative tasks, lack of time, supervising colleagues, and managing student behaviors. SETs work-related stressors influenced feelings of stress, frustration, overwhelm, anxiety, exhaustion, and depression. Consistent negative feelings led SETs to engage in coping resources such as communication with school administrators and family, taking time off, and diet and exercise. SETs also recommended additional resources they would like to have in the school environment to foster a positive emotional well-being. Recommendations included reduced work-load, behavior coaching, additional adult support, fostered collaboration, training, physical and mental health support.

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As you always reminded me:

"Look good, feel good, play good. Chants up. "

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Fifty-five percent of teachers considered leaving the field of education in the year 2021 (Walker et al., 2019). Teacher burnout and high teacher turnover rates are a result of increased work-related stress (McIntyre et al. 's , 2017). Teachers have a direct impact on approximately ninety-five percent of our nation's youth, which can influence student's physical health and behavior patterns as teachers play a key role promoting the health and safety of young people and helping them establish lifelong healthy behavior patterns (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2019). Social and emotional initiatives in schools typically focus on students and do not address the social and emotional needs of teachers (Cavioni et al., 2020).

Special education teachers (SETs) can be viewed to have more difficult, demanding, and stressful job expectations compared to their colleagues (Bettini et al., 2017; Cancio et al., 2018). General education teachers' job expectations are to provide standards-based instruction, as well as differentiate instruction, based on a student with disabilities Individualized Education Program (IEP) or 504 plan when having difficulty with the academic content being presented (Bettini et al., 2017). SETs' job expectations are not as clearly defined regarding if special education students should be included in the general education with support from a SET or the SET should instruct them exclusively in a different learning environment compared to their peers, based on their individual needs (Bettini et al., 2017; Billingsley, 2004; Cancio et al., 2018). Fifty percent of SETs leave the field in the first five years (Billingsley, 2004). Literature regarding what is known about teachers' work-related stress and emotional well being will be reviewed extensively in Chapter two.

Problem Statement

Worldwide the teaching profession has been recognized as one of the most stressful careers (Sneyers et al., 2016). Educational policies and initiatives developed in response to societal changes can impact teachers' emotional well-being (Hester et al., 2020; Sneyers et al., 2016). Losing effective teachers because of work-related stress, can result in a significant impact on student academic achievement, work relationships with colleagues, student behavior, and quality of instruction (Cancio et al., 2018; Moore et al., 2018; Sneyers et al., 2016; Williams & Dikes, 2015). SETs are reported to leave the field of education at approximately twice the rate of general education teachers (Williams & Dikes, 2015). Fifty percent of SETs leave the field in the first five years of teaching due to work-related stress (Herman et al., 2017). Teacher retention continues to be an area of concern in education, especially for high needs fields such as special education (Fisher & Royster, 2016). Stress is one of the primary predictors of whether an educator will stay in the classroom (Ryan et al.'s, 2017).

It is reported that, on average, teachers will encounter about 5.2 stressful work situations per week (Sneyers et al., 2016). Roughly fifty-one percent of teachers reported feeling extremely stressed multiple days during the work week (Williams & Dikes, 2015). Teacher stress can be associated with a variety of factors including student classroom behaviors, work relationships with colleagues, and unclear job expectations (Cancio et al., 2018; Fisher & Royster, 2016; Moore et al., 2018; Sneyers et al., 2016; Williams & Dikes, 2015). Extreme levels of stress can lead to burnout, which refers to the emotional exhaustion and depersonalization that comes with working in a profession where individuals engage in "people work" of some kind (Fisher & Royster, 2016; Pressley et al., 2021; Williams & Dikes, 2015). SETs in particular tend to have unclear work expectations, compared to their general education colleagues (Fisher & Royster,

2016). Teachers can feel elevated stress levels and may want to leave the field when they do not have clear job expectations or school based support from colleagues and administrators regarding emotional well-being (Fisher & Royster, 2016; Moore et al., 2018).

Teachers who are dedicated, committed, and recognize the needs of other people are most at risk for leaving the field (Fisher & Royster, 2016). These teachers specifically, "feel a pressure from within to work and help and we feel a pressure from the outside to give" (Freudenberger, 1974a, pg.161). SETs can be at risk for increased stress and burnout because they typically feel the need to take on more job responsibilities for themselves. Each teacher responds to stress differently based on their personal and professional backgrounds and training (Haydon et al., 2018). Teacher stress can influence an increase in inappropriate student behaviors, lack of classroom management, and poor relationships with colleagues (Cancio et al., 2018; Fisher & Royster, 2016; Moore et al., 2018; Sneyers et al., 2016; Williams & Dikes, 2015). Stress related to teaching can also have an impact on the teachers' emotional well-being (Herman et al., 2017). When teachers struggle to identify appropriate coping strategies to alleviate their work-related stress, they may feel that the work they do is not meaningful, they may lose motivation, or they may lose enthusiasm (Cancio et al., 2018). Teachers who experience stress may negatively impact student academic achievement, relationships with students and colleagues, student engagement, and quality of teaching (Cancio et al., 2018; Moore et al., 2018; Sneyers et al., 2016; Williams & Dikes, 2015). When teachers experience stress they may not be able to produce engaging high quality instruction for their students which may also have an impact on student achievement. In addition, teachers who are stressed may not collaborate with colleagues regarding instructional aspects to meet the needs of their students. The purpose of this study is to examine the impact of work-related stressors on novice elementary SETs' emotional

well-being in the school environment. Currently, there is little to no research regarding this demographic of teachers and their emotional well-being while in the school environment. This research is important because teachers are coming out of the teacher preparatory program with excitement, only to find out that they continuously are facing adversity due role ambiguity and lack of consistent support.

Below, the researcher will describe the nature of the study and theoretical framework, as well as, define key terms represented in the study. The assumptions associated with the research, research scope, delimitations, limitations, and significance of the study will also be provided.

Nature of the study

Stress has been identified as one of the primary indicators for SETs wanting to leave the field of education (Hester et al., 2020). Previous research has identified a variety of work-related stressors for both general education teachers and SETs, and the impact teacher stress may have on retention. However, there is little research regarding how work-related stress may impact SETs' emotional well-being. The purpose of this case study is to examine the impact of work-related stressors on novice elementary special education teachers. In order to achieve this purpose, novice elementary SETS were selected as co-participants in this research. This study is guided by three research questions:

1. What type of situations influence novice elementary SETs' emotional well-being?
2. What supports are offered in the school environment to support novice elementary SETs' emotional-well being?
3. How do novice elementary SETs perceive the school environment in relation to their emotional well-being?

Data collection and analysis procedures are further described in Chapter three.

Theoretical Framework

According to Lazarus and Folkman (1984), when a person experiences excessive life demands, a cognitive process is triggered in which the individual has to decide if the life demands exceed their available resources, and determine how one might cope with these experiences, which could lead to stress (Lambert et al., 2009). Lazarus and Folkman defined stress as, "the emotional, cognitive, and physiological experience when environmental demands exceed an individual's resources to adapt" (Herman et al., 2020, pg.70). How a teacher identifies work-related stressors is based on their appraisal of the situation, which can be categorized as a primary or secondary appraisal. A primary appraisal is when an individual assesses if a stressor is considered a challenge and a secondary appraisal is how an individual reflects upon a situation and considers various coping options. Coping was defined as, "the individual's attempt to manage the demands" (Herman et al., 2020, p. 70). There are two types of coping with which an individual can engage, emotion-focused strategies and problem-focused strategies. Emotion focused strategies can be implemented to manage emotions associated with stress which could include taking deep breaths before engaging in a stressful situation, or meditating after a stressful day of work. Problem focused strategies for coping can be intended to change a stressful situation, which could include a teacher using behavior management strategies to address a student's behavior or asking an administrator to intervene during a stressful situation (McCarthy, 2019).

The research questions for this study were shaped by the transactional theory of stress and coping model, which consists of an individual identifying stressors, how the person

appraises stressors, and which coping strategies will be implemented to address potential stress.

This model can be viewed as one of the most influential models regarding stress and coping in

educational research (Herman et al., 2020). Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) model is represented

in the figure below:

Figure 1.

Transactional Theory of Stress and Coping Model
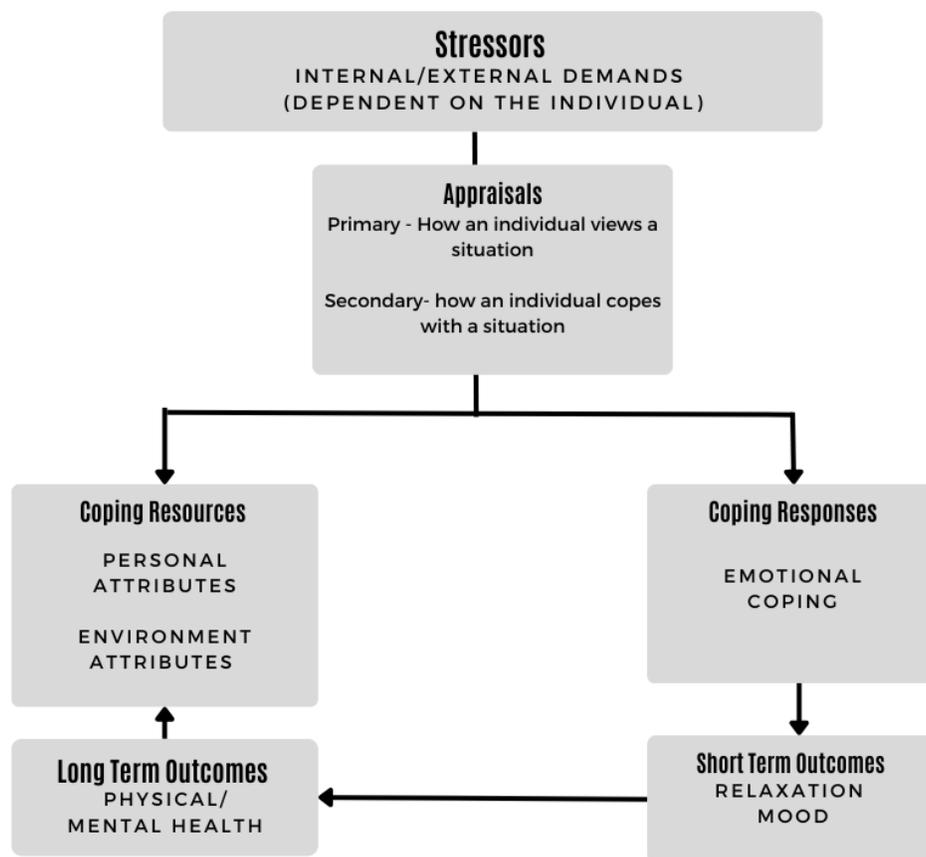
Note. Depiction of the transactional theory of stress and coping model representing different stressors and options for coping mechanisms. From Lazarus, R. S., and Folkman, S. (1984). Stress, Appraisal, and Coping. New York: Springer.

This theoretical framework guided the development of the research questions, interview questions, and journal prompts that were posed to a group of novice elementary SETs during the data collection phase of this study.

Operational Definitions

For this study the following key terms are defined and used:

Burnout- Burnout refers to the emotional exhaustion and depersonalization that comes with working in a profession where individuals engage in "people work" of some kind (Williams & Dikes, 2015, pg. 339).

Case study- A case study in the field of social sciences refers to the investigation of a phenomenon in real-life contexts (Yin, 2014).

Coping- How an individual attempts to manage environmental demands relating to emotional, cognitive, and physiological experiences (Herman et al., 2020, pg.70).

Emotional Well-Being- Emotional well-being is the balance between positive and negative emotions (Drewery, 2019). Someone with a positive emotional well-being would overall experience more positive emotions in a day compared to negative emotions.

Environmental Triangulation- Identifies which environmental factor, if any, may have influenced the information received during the data collection period (Guion et al., 2011).

Fostered Collaboration- Employees working together to share ideas to reach a common goal and building their relationships (Rabha, 2023).

Informational Interview- An informal conversation with someone in the field of interest to you (Berkeley University of California, 2019).

Reflective Journal- A reflective journal is a documentation tool used for an individual to critically reflect upon a learning experience (Northern Illinois University Center for Innovative Teaching and Learning, 2012). Reflective journals are typically submitted to a person and analyzed to see if learning has occurred or a change over time.

Special education teacher- Special education teachers (SETs) are trained individuals who teach students who may have learning, developmental, physical, behavioral or emotional needs that are addressed in the school setting (U.S. Dept. of Labor Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2006).

Stress- A psychological or physiological response to a situation when a person's resources are perceived to be threatened (Ryan et al., 2017). Stress can interfere with a person's well-being and weaken their performance. Stress is evident typically when there is an imbalance between resources and demands (Herman et al., 2017).

Teacher Stress- Teacher stress refers to the negative emotions that teachers may experience including anger, frustration, or depression when faced with aspects of work (Pressley et al., 2021). Teacher stress can affect their physical health and their emotional well-being (Haydon et al., 2018).

Thematic coding- An analysis tool to determine if there are any commonalities between data sets. It involves analyzing the information obtained during data collection and constructing themes based on the findings (Kiger & Varpio, 2020).

Triangulation- This technique is used to avoid potential biases when interpreting data from more than one data source that engages in the same methodology (Heale & Forbes, 2013). There are a variety of different triangulation methods in qualitative research including data

triangulation, investigator triangulation, theory triangulation, methodological triangulation, and environmental triangulation (Guion et al., 2011).

Work-related stress- Work-related stress differs between individuals. It can be defined as negative feelings, feelings of pressure, nervousness, or pressure that an individual may feel while at work (Asaloei et al., 2020).

Assumptions, Scope, Delimitations, and Limitations

Assumptions

It is assumed that the participants of this study will openly express work-related stressors they possibly face in their jobs. Based on previous research, teachers experience a variety of work-related stressors in the school environment (Fisher & Royster, 2016). It is assumed that the participants for this study will actively and honestly engage in the interview process and reflective journals to answer the questions that will be asked. Participants will be expected to understand the questions being asked of them or it is assumed the participants will ask clarification questions if needed.

Scope

While there is well documented quantitative data to depict work-related stressors of SETs, there is little to no qualitative research investigating SETs work-related stressors. The aim of this study was to report any work-related stressors identified by the participants, how work-related stress may impact their emotional well-being, and what strategies they may currently engage in to alleviate any identified work-related stress in the school setting. The scope of this study is limited to the recruitment of novice elementary SETs in the geographic region in

which the study was conducted. Novice elementary SETs were the focus of this study because SETs are leaving the field at a more rapid rate compared to general education teachers, novice teachers are more likely to leave the field in their first five years of teaching, and elementary teachers are proven to have an increased work-load compared to secondary teachers (Walker et al., 2019).

This qualitative study was conducted using a phenomenological approach because past research has primarily used quantitative research methods, leaving out the voices of participants. Transactional theory of stress is the theoretical framework that guided the development of research questions and how data was analyzed (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984). Heuristics is the theoretical perspective that was implemented because heuristics focus on a question or problem that the researcher wants to answer that has been a personal challenge for the researcher (Moustakas, 2013). The research purpose and questions were established by the researcher based on a review of literature and past experiences of the researcher. The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of work-related stressors on novice elementary SETs' emotional well-being. The study is guided by three research questions: (1) How do novice elementary SETs manage their work-related stress in the school environment?, (2) What supports are in place at school for novice elementary SETs to improve their emotional well-being?, and (3) How does work-related stress influence novice elementary SETs' emotional well-being?

Participants for this study had to identify as being a novice SET, working in the elementary school setting. Participants were recruited by the researcher identifying the elementary schools in the school district in which the study is to be conducted. From there, the researcher identified the SETs at each elementary school and sent them an email requesting their participation in the study based on the previously established participant factors.

Data for this study was collected in the academic year 2022/23 by conducting interviews and reviewing reflective journal entries completed by participants. An online video conferencing platform was used for 1:1 participant interview and participants also responded to digital reflective journal prompts as a second form of data for the researcher. The researcher reminded participants to complete their journal entries each week.

The primary goal of this study was to incorporate the voices of the SET participants. In previous quantitative research, statistical data analysis revealed the findings of the study. Qualitative inquiry was used in this study to amplify the voices of SETS in the context of work-related stressors. Based on the findings, participants were able to convey their emotions and provide real-world examples of what causes them stress at work. This is in hopes that there could be a positive change regarding SETs' emotional well-being at work and them staying in the field of education. Findings are intended to be published on a public platform in which teachers, school districts, and community stakeholders will have access.

Delimitations

Qualitative research was performed for this study because the researcher wanted to amplify teachers' voices regarding the topic of teacher work-related stress. Hester et al., (2020) called for a qualitative study to be conducted based on the limitations of their quantitative study regarding teacher work-related stress. Data for this study was analyzed through the lens of Lazarus and Folkman's transactional theory of stress and coping model. According to Lazarus and Folkman (1984) the transactional theory of stress and coping model uses objective appraisal to help people cope with stressful situations. The researchers recognize that individuals may experience stress when there are excessive work-demands without adequate resources to cope

with the demands. Work-related stress for teachers has been expressed as a result of lack of support from administrators, other responsibilities such as collaboration, and the needs of the students (Hester et al., 2020). Lazarus and Folkman (1984) suggested that when work-related stress factors become overwhelming, teachers' environmental demands may exceed their resources to cope with the stress.

There is little research regarding stress and coping mechanisms in the educational setting, especially for SETs (Cancio et al., 2018). When conducting research revolving around the topic of stress, researchers tend to focus on larger groups of teachers with varying backgrounds, subject areas, and grade levels (Fisher & Royster, 2016). SETs are rapidly leaving the field due to work-load responsibilities and stress (Hester et al., 2020). There has been an increase in evaluating school systems by researchers, pre-service special education programs, and school systems due to the continuous issues with teacher retention.

One-third of all new teachers leave the field after the first three years of teaching. These teachers reported leaving because they were dissatisfied with their jobs, seeking better paying jobs, or a diversion in their careers (Cancio et al., 2018). There was an increase in job expectations and responsibilities for teachers during the 2020/21 school year after schools were closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Pressley et al., 2021). The work-load of novice teachers impacts their working conditions and is related to their stress levels, dissatisfaction, self-efficacy, and career decisions (Mehrenberg, 2013; Pogodzinski, 2013). Novice teachers tend to take on more work responsibilities then their senior peers (Walker et al., 2019). Novice teachers struggled with learning new technology components, new classroom environments, and policies and procedures (Pogodzinski, 2013).

Limitations

A limitation of this study was the amount of time allotted for data collection. The school district in which the study had taken place only allowed data to be collected during August through January in the school year. Based on the start date of the study and acceptance of IRB for the school district and for the University, there was a small window of time to collect data, allowing the researcher to only evaluate data from a specific time of year. Teachers' work-related stress can be impacted by developing factors as the school year progresses (Pressley et al., 2021). Having flexibility of when data can be collected could impact the themes identified in the findings.

Recruitment of SETs via their district email may influence the number of participants for the research study. If participants are resistant to email, or feel that their responses may not be kept confidential, they might opt to not participate. All participants were volunteers and the willingness of a certain set of teachers may create bias in the sample. Other methods of recruitment could influence the number of participants for the study, providing findings that are more generalizable. Other recruitment methods could include personal and professional connections, fliers, emails, newspaper advertisements, or social media postings (Roulston, 2018). There was no exclusionary criteria identified regarding participants.

The study took place exclusively in a specific school district of the Southeast region of the United States and was an identified limitation. The results are specific to a group of individuals, in a particular region of the country, which may not be representative for the whole population of novice elementary SETs in the United States. Comparing more SETs' experiences in multiple school districts would provide greater insight.

The Significance of the Study

SET voices had not yet been amplified in previous research to address the needs of emotional well-being support, which can impact whether they stay in the field of education. Quantitative studies were used to study SETS job stressors, but there is little to no qualitative research regarding SETs work-related stressors in relation to their emotional well-being (Andrews and Brown 2015; Gersten et al. 2001; Hamama et al. 2012; Hester et al., 2020; Mastropieri 2001; Shen et al. 2015; Williams and Dikes 2015). By addressing the needs for emotional well-being support for SETs, proactive strategies such as support from administrators, professional development, and mentoring can be implemented to aid in overall work outcomes. These strategies could also be taught and implemented during SETs' pre-service programs to build a strong foundation for positive emotional well-being in the field of education.

Addressing SETs' emotional well-being concerns will directly impact them and may also impact the students they serve. When teachers are both physically and mentally healthy, they are more likely to have a positive impact on student academic achievement and behavior, positive working relationships with colleagues, and effective instruction in the classroom (Cancio et al., 2018; Moore et al., 2018; Sneyers et al., 2016; Williams & Dikes, 2015). By collecting qualitative data from SETs, the intent is to identify data reflecting any significant needs for emotional well-being support in the school setting based on the teacher's self-reports of work-related stress.

Data from this study can be used to inform school administrators, school districts, and policy makers of the potential areas of need for novice elementary SETS emotional well-being. This research may be valuable to school districts in particular when aiming to retain high quality

SETs and to address current SET job openings and have a positive impact on students overall academic achievement. The data collected will be used to begin conversations about what may be causing stress for novice elementary SETs and implications for interventions to aid in alleviating identified work-related stressors.

Conclusion

Teachers face a variety of challenges in their work environment which can include role ambiguity, struggling relationships with other teachers or administrators, and burnout (Fisher & Royster, 2016; Pressley et al., 2021; Williams & Dikes, 2015). With these challenges can come teacher stress. SETs in particular are found to have unclear job expectations compared to their colleagues, which can increase the likelihood of work-related stress (Hester et al., 2020). SETs and novice teachers are two times more likely to leave the field than their colleagues (Billingsley, 2004). The purpose of this study was to identify novice elementary SETs' work-related stressors and how it may impact their emotional well-being in the school setting. In the subsequent chapters of this research, previous literature was reviewed, research methods are described, as well as the collection and analysis of data to determine the findings regarding the purpose of this research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

In this chapter, literature regarding the overarching problems of teacher stress, burnout, and teacher retention were extensively reviewed. The scope of this research made it important to investigate both general education and special education teachers' job expectations, with a comparison of the two. Literature regarding teacher emotions, burnout, teacher retention, work-related stress, general education and special education work-related stressors, and strategies to alleviate teacher stress were examined. Previous literature published between 1977 and 2023, regarding qualitative research, heuristics, and case study research were reviewed prior to chapter three, providing necessary background information about methods used in this study. Uncovering evidence regarding teachers' emotional well-being is critical in alleviating potential work-related stress (Lee et al., 2016). Stress levels of teachers can decrease when provided with adequate instructional and emotional support (Wong & Ruble., 2017). The review of literature specifically focused on teacher job expectations, teacher emotions, burnout, teacher work-related stressors, teacher retention, and qualitative research to explore a problem.

Review of Literature

Teacher Job Expectations

Teachers can experience work-related stress when job expectations are unclear, leading to issues with teacher retention. Daily teachers are expected to uphold high expectations for their students, encourage student collaboration, provide clear and prompt feedback to their students, and encourage student involvement, along with a wide range of other day to day tasks. Earlier

work recognized that teachers experience stress due to their perceptions that they are unable to meet the various job expectations required of them (Kyriacou & Sutcliffe, 1977). Job expectations of teachers vary among the different types of teachers in schools and different classroom settings.

       Special Education Teacher Job Expectations. Special Education Teachers (SETs) do some of the same work as general education teachers and are required to engage in many additional roles and responsibilities. Job expectations of SETs vary depending on the teachers' classroom setting, students' identified disabilities, area of disability concentration for instruction, and grade level they teach (Bettini et al., 2017; Billingsley, 2004). Many SETs' job expectations are federally or state mandated based on special education law. SETs specialize in providing individualized and specific instruction for students' with disabilities, developing federally mandated Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), modifying curriculum, assessing student performance, meeting with parents and guardians, overseeing teaching assistants, and managing a variety of classroom settings (Alliant International University, 2020; Bettini et al., 2017; Billingsley, 2004). Instruction for students with disabilities can be provided both academically or functionally. Functional instruction could include lessons regarding student behaviors, organization, or time management in the classroom. Instructional materials and plans produced by a SET are based on their students' Individual Education Plans (IEP) (Alliant International University, 2020). Based on the variety of students' IEPs, SETs may be responsible for teaching multiple subjects among a variety of settings, with few resources to accommodate the variety of instruction (Youngs et al., 2011).

       SET job expectations can include teaching students in a variety of settings such as self-contained, resource, or inclusion classrooms. A resource setting allows students with a

disability to be included in a general education classroom for a part of the regular school day, usually assisted by a paraprofessional. A self-contained classroom can either include students with one type of disability criteria or students with a mix of disabilities. When there are students with a variety of disabilities in one classroom it is commonly referred to as a multi-categorical classroom. A SET resource teacher works closely with each student's homeroom teacher to foster the student's success while in the general education setting. An inclusion class is a general education classroom consisting of a population of students with and without disabilities. These classrooms typically consist of a general education teacher and a SET working together as a co-teaching team (American Academy of Special Education Professionals, 2006). When working together collaboratively, the teachers are developing engaging lesson plans for their specific classroom instruction, but SETs in particular are usually expected to modify the curriculum to meet the learning style and needs of students with a disability (American Academy of Special Education Professionals, 2006).

SETs are responsible for curriculum development and implementing IEP components such as accommodations and modifications (Springer et al., 2007). McLaughlin (2022), explained that both accommodations and modifications "can be a device, practice, intervention, or procedure provided to a student with a disability that affords equal access to instruction or assessment" (p. 23). An IEP must contain individualized, appropriate accommodations that are necessary to measure the academic achievement and functional performance of the student in a variety of settings in the school environment. A wide variety of accommodations can be provided for a student to increase academic and functional success, for example, a reduced course load and/or extended time on exams (Newman & Madaus, 2014). Accommodations and

modifications are typically implemented during instructional times of the school day for students to be able to access curriculum.

SETs engage in progress monitoring to determine whether students are making progress toward their IEP goals and if the students' academic or functional interventions are providing the intended benefit. Progress monitoring is an assessment typically given weekly, to measure the student's response to an intervention (Lemons et al., 2019). The data obtained during frequent progress monitoring helps the teacher determine effectiveness of instruction and allows them to make more informed instructional decisions (Safer & Fleischman, 2005). Progress monitoring data is used to guide IEP decisions during annual or special review IEP meetings.

IEP meetings involve a committee to discuss the progress of the student with a disability and to plan the next year's IEP. The IEP committee must consist of the SET, general education teacher, local educational agency (LEA), the student's parent or guardian, and any other support personnel that is specific to the student (American Academy of Special Education Professionals, 2006). Parent involvement in the IEP process and frequent communication between a SET and a parent or guardian is required by special education law.

In addition to parent conferences and IEP meetings, SETs share progress monitoring data with parents or guardians during the student's annual parent conferences. The focus of these meetings is usually to discuss the academic and social progress of the student. These conferences typically last between ten and twenty minutes, involving the student's teacher and parent or guardian. The teacher has an agenda that reports information such as test scores, work samples, and general observations shared with the parent (Morin, 2022). During these meetings, SETs can communicate data gathered by a paraprofessional who works with the student

Supervising and mentoring paraprofessionals who work directly with students with disabilities is a job expectation unique to SETs. Traditionally, paraprofessionals will help teachers by organizing learning materials and assisting in lesson set-up and clean-up. Additional requirements of paraprofessionals include working collaboratively with teachers to complete daily classroom tasks, supporting academic instruction and behavior management with specific students, working in small groups, or with the whole class (Wiggs et al., 2021). SETs are not only responsible for their own job responsibilities, but also supporting the paraprofessionals in their classrooms. This can be viewed as having two different job responsibilities , the job of providing instruction as a SET and providing support for paraprofessionals.

General Education Teacher Job Expectations. General education teachers are expected to provide high quality, standards based, grade level instruction to all students. General education instruction typically is guided by a specific curriculum aligned to curriculum maps, specific instructional scheduling, and predetermined instructional materials (Bettini et al., 2017; Dingle et al., 2004; Youngs et al., 2011). They can also be responsible for planning and preparing lessons, developing teaching materials, all while encouraging student engagement. Lesson preparation can be influenced by teachers getting to know their students' learning styles and prior knowledge regarding a topic, which can guide curriculum objectives, activities, or resources needed to supplement the lessons. General education teachers create curriculum lessons to actively engage the students they teach in their class.

Student engagement is the quality of effort students dedicate to educational activities that contribute directly to instructional desired outcomes (Kraus and Coates, 2008). Examples of ways teachers can foster student engagement include thoughtfully selecting activities based on students interests and abilities, pace of instruction being delivered, and supporting students

during whole group, small group, or individual instruction (Heilporn et al., 2021). When teachers support students in instruction they are able to assess whether or not the instruction being provided to students is appropriate.

General education teachers are required to assess the students' learning using informal formative assessments or formal summative assessments. A formative assessment is a tool that helps identify the areas where students need additional support. Examples of formative assessments can include in-class discussions, quizzes, exit tickets, homework assignments, or surveys. A summative assessment evaluates student understanding at the end of an instructional period, like a unit, course, or program. Examples of summative assessments can include teacher created exams, standardized tests, final grades, final projects, or final presentations (*Formative and summative assessments: Poorvu Center for teaching and learning*, 2022). General education teachers are required to grade student assessments in a timely manner, allowing the teacher to monitor student performance data over time; this information is used to guide future instruction (Blane, 2022). Teachers can work collaboratively with each other when evaluating data to plan for appropriate instruction based on student needs. .

General education teachers are responsible for additional tasks which can include collaborating with colleagues, engaging in professional development, and completing administrative tasks. Professional development for teachers can include activities, seminars, or training designed to improve teachers' job-related knowledge, skills, or attitudes (Tran et al., 2020). Professional development is typically a tool used for colleague collaboration, which is when two or more professionals interact with one another and work together toward a common goal (Murawski, 2001). On top of these job expectations, general education teachers can also be responsible for completing administrative tasks like printing or photocopying resources for

lessons, setting up technology equipment, ordering equipment and resources, or keeping and filing records (Blane, 2022). Blane (2022) also found that general education teachers have increased levels of stress when they do not have time for instructional planning because of other job expectations.

Comparison of Positions

Additional workload without support and unclear job expectations has caused SETs to express wanting to leave the field of education (Cancio et al., 2018; Fisher & Royster, 2016; Moore et al., 2018; Sneyers et al., 2016; Springer et al., 2007; Williams & Dikes, 2015). In 2020, there were 463,200 SETs job openings reported in the nation, which is projected to increase by 8% in the next ten years (U.S. Dept. of Labor Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2006). SETs who plan to stay in the field reported higher job satisfaction and plenty of time and energy for the expected job responsibilities than those who planned to leave (Cancio et al., 2018). In Cancio et al.'s (2018) findings many SETs expressed the need for more time during the work day to complete expected job duties, especially when addressing a variety of students and the settings in which they may teach.

General education teachers' job expectations generally are more clearly defined compared to SETs (Fisher & Royster, 2016). Most SETs are expected to collaborate with general education teachers as one of their job responsibilities, but also are expected to uphold mandated special education laws specific to students with disabilities. For example, SETs conduct parent conferences like general education teachers, but also prepare and conduct IEP meetings for the students with disabilities on their caseload. IEP meetings are required to be held at least once annually, but special review meetings can occur based on a possible need for change to the IEP

document. Paperwork associated with SET job expectations, such as IEP development and maintenance, is viewed by SET as time consuming, thus influencing SET stress because it is a requirement of their job. It has been estimated that SETs complete, on average, five hours of special education paperwork a day (Mehrenberg, 2013). This is an additional job requirement of SETs that general education teachers do not have..

With the development of an IEP, the IEP team is required to determine the least restrictive environment for students' with disabilities.(LRE). A LRE is where students' with disabilities are placed so that they can achieve the highest level of functional and academic success possible. Classroom settings considered for LRE could be an inclusion classroom, resource classroom, or self-contained classroom. This means that SETs are expected to be able address the needs of these students in a variety of settings, whereas general education teachers are expected to teach in one classroom setting. SETs determine LRE based on a variety of data collected over time from a variety of sources and in multiple settings, to identify which classroom setting is most appropriate for the student with disabilities. During this time, discussions regarding accommodations, modifications, and other supports are determined to support the student in their LRE.

A special education classroom typically will be staffed with a SET and a paraprofessional. Paraprofessionals overarching responsibilities are to assist the SET with both the academic and functional needs of the students in the classroom. They can help the SET with administrative tasks such as gathering lesson materials and photocopying, but a SET has to instruct and give direction to the paraprofessional regarding these needs which is an added responsibility. General education teachers usually do not have another teacher in their classroom, although some elementary classrooms have teaching assistants. In some instances, a student's

accommodations may call for an additional teacher in the classroom. Even when a paraprofessional is in a general education classroom, the SET is usually the individual who continues to oversee the paraprofessionals' job responsibilities. This additional duty a more constant occurrence for SETs and can be a job component that adds to already unclear and full job expectations.

SETs can have increased levels of stress due to the number of additional job responsibilities and potential role ambiguity (Fisher & Royster, 2016; Pressley et al., 202; Williams & Dikes, 2015). Teachers' emotions affect themselves, the students they serve, and interactions between colleagues. Both positive and negative emotions impact teachers differently, which can influence whether teachers stay in their current positions or want to leave the field of education.

Teacher Emotions

Teachers experience a variety of positive and negative emotions relating to their job responsibilities. Teachers feel that it is part of their jobs to regulate their emotions in the classroom and provide quality instruction for their students (Bracket et al., 2010; King & Ng, 2018; Lee et al., 2016). There is little research regarding what specific emotions teachers experience regularly and how those emotions are managed in the school environment (Bajorek et al., 2014; Brackett et al., 2010; Lee et al., 2016). Each teacher can experience emotions differently in the school environment based on how they perceive work situations and manage emotions. Emotions can be defined as, "sets of psychological processes which are interrelated and are the feelings that an individual experiences towards certain stimuli" (Pekrun et al., 2011). Emotions can be categorized into negative and positive domains (Csikszentmihalyi & Larson,

1987; Diener, 1999; Erarslan, 2021; Larson et al., 1990; Torquati & Raffaelli, 2004; Watson & Clark, 1988; Watson & Tellegen, 1985). The emotions of joy, satisfaction, pride, and excitement are positive emotions while anger, frustration, stress, anxiety, and sadness are negative emotions (Chen, 2016; Hargreaves,1998; Kristjansson, 2016; Sutton & Wheatley, 2003). A teacher who is considered to have negative emotions, may not have the energy to provide effective lessons (Bajorek et al., 2014; Talbot & Mercer, 2018). In order to improve student outcomes, policy makers need to address issues regarding teachers' health and emotional well-being (Bajorek et al.'s, 2014). Negative emotions can not only affect the teacher, but students and colleague interactions as well. Research has shown that there are some effective emotional interventions for teachers that improve emotion management in the school environment.

Emotion management in educational research has been guided by two foci, emotional regulatory processes and emotional labor (Lee et al., 2016). Problems with emotional regulation can lead to burn out and issues with teacher retention (Bracket et al., 2010; Lee et al., 2016; Talbot & Mercer, 2018). Emotion regulation can be referred to as, "the processes by which individuals influence which emotions they have, when they have them, and how they experience and express these emotions"(Gross 1998, p. 275). Sutton and Knight (2006) had determined that some teachers with the ability to actively regulate both positive and negative emotions in the classroom overall had increased student engagement and positive classroom management. Emotional labor can be defined as, "the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display" (Hochschild 1983, p. 7). Teachers face issues with emotional labor due to feeling pressured to follow certain rules in their classrooms, which can lead to overly expressing their positive emotions and suppressing their negative emotions (Lee et al., 2016). Suppressing negative emotions can also be referred to as down-regulating which can involve

reducing an emotional experience (Sutton et al., 2009). Teachers have reported down regulating emotions, such as anger in the classroom, to maintain their planned instruction and continue positive relationships with students.

Burnout

Teachers who experience work-related stress tend to experience an increased likelihood of feeling burnout. Stress is the primary indicator that leads to burnout (Kant & Shanker, 2021). Burnout can be defined as, "the emotional exhaustion and depersonalization that comes with working in a profession where individuals engage in "people work" of some kind (Williams & Dikes, 2015, pg. 339)". There are three identified domains for burnout including emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment. Emotional exhaustion can be defined as "feelings of emotional distress and depletion of emotional resources, loss of energy, and fatigue" (pg.99). Emotional exhaustion for teachers can be caused when they feel that colleagues and school administrators are insensitive to their feelings (Tan, 2022). Insensitivity to teachers' feelings can include not understanding the stress that can be related to one's job expectations. Depersonalization can include, "negative detached feelings and behaviors towards students, irritability, loss of idealism, and psychological withdrawal" (pg.101). Depersonalization for teachers in particular can be related to teachers feeling emotionally depleted by job‑related demands, a disconnection toward students and colleagues, and feelings of not being an effective educator (Oberle et al., 2020). When teachers feel like they are not able to complete job expectations or rely on their colleagues, they feel an increase in stress which leads to burnout and issues with teacher retention. Lastly, reduced personal accomplishment can be the, "loss of feelings of competence and efficacy at work, reduced productivity,

demoralization, and inability to cope with work demands" (Maslach and Jackson's, 1981, pg. 101). Reduced personal accomplishment has been found to lead to increased levels of stress (Wong & Ruble, 2017).

Teachers who experience reduced personal accomplishment may have little satisfaction regarding their job outcomes and may exhibit negative behaviors when evaluating themselves or others. Negative behavior symptoms that can be associated with burnout can include a loss of self esteem, depression, or emotional exhaustion; with emotional exhaustion to be the main component of teacher burnout. Physical symptoms of burnout include extreme fatigue, feeling unable to relax, getting sick easier, or developing ulcers or other gastrointestinal illnesses (Freudenberger, 1974a; Freudenberger, 1975; Maslach & Jackson, 1981; Williams et al., 2022).

Each teacher can experience emotions differently based on where their school context , what resources are available, or support provided in the work environment. Human service professions, such as teaching, have been studied extensively regarding burnout due to its worldwide prevalence (Iancu et al., 2017; Maslach et al., 2010; Oliveira et al., 2021). SETs have a higher level of burnout compared to their general education colleagues (Küçüksüleymanoglu, 2011). Burnout can be evident when work expectations are high and there is a lack of resources available in the school setting (Dias et al., 2021, Garwood et al., 2017, Williams et al., 2022). Previous literature found social and emotional aspects of teaching to influence burnout. Oliveira's (2021) meta-analysis of thirteen empirical studies regarding teacher burnout summarized that the social and emotional well-being of teachers can be associated with emotional exhaustion. Social and emotional interventions for teachers had a positive impact on reducing emotional exhaustion, with depersonalization not to be overall statistically significant towards teacher burnout. When teachers show symptoms of burnout, they typically socially

isolate themselves from co-workers and students, are unhappy with their jobs, and are less productive (Williams et al., 2022). Teachers who have increased burnout can experience lack of clarity of their role, increased work-load, emotional exhaustion, or lack of accomplishment, which can all lead to teachers feeling an increase in work-related stress (Dias et al., 2021, Garwood et al., 2017, Kant & Shanker, 2021, Maslach & Jackson, 1981, Williams et al., 2022).

Teachers experience a variety of positive and negative emotions in their careers. Each teacher experiences emotions differently based on their job expectations and perceptions of work-related stress. When teachers feel stressed they are more likely to experience burnout. Burnout can affect individuals behaviorally and emotionally, which can have a negative effect on the teacher, their students, and other relationships in the school environment. Emotional interventions have been implemented to aid in alleviating negative emotions and burnout, some proven to be successful. Teachers' work-related stress can vary among the different types of teachers in the school, the type of classroom setting, or students that they serve.

Teacher Work-Related Stressors

Teacher work-related stressors vary among teachers and can elicit negative emotions such as anger, stress, anxiety, or frustration (Pressley et al., 2021). High levels of work-related stress contribute to the 50% of teachers leaving the classroom in the first five years of teaching (Algozzine, Wang, & Violette, 2011; Haydon et al., 2018). Teachers have increased levels of stress when there are additional job expectations that are unclear, which could be hall monitoring, bus duty, or patrolling bathrooms **(**Fisher & Royster, 2016). Teachers who are unable to determine a balance between work expectations and experiences continually feel stress from work that leads to burnout (Andrews & Brown, 2015; Betoret, 2006; Klassen & Chiu, 2010).

Teachers experience work-related stress differently based on a variety of personal and instructional factors including a teacher's personality, values, and instructional skills (Pressley et al., 2021; Ryan et al., 2017; Stoeber & Rennert, 2008). The source of teacher stress is influenced by school organization, inequality of job demands, lack of work resources, and social and emotional competence. School organization refers to administrative support and structure in the school. When school administrators are unable to provide sufficient structure and do not adequately understand the job expectations of the teachers, it can cause teachers increased work-related stress. Teachers who struggle with role ambiguity tend to be more likely to leave the field of education due to increased burnout (Fisher & Royster, 2016; Pressley et al., 2021; Williams & Dikes, 2015).

Lack of organization in the school setting can bring increased stress to novice or teachers in particular because these teachers can already be having difficulty with the new job demands. Job demands of teachers can include excessive paperwork, insufficient time for planning, and additional job expectations. Lack of decision-making relating to instructional materials and emotional support can have a negative impact on teachers' work relationships, relationships with parents, and students (Haydon et al., 2018; Herman et al., 2017; Lambert et al., 2015; Lambert et al., 2019; Pressley et al., 2021). Novice teachers have expressed working with experienced colleagues as mentors to be helpful with adjusting to job expectations and reducing work-related stress.

Teacher work-related stress can impact many different areas including students' academic achievement, quality of instruction for students, and work relationships with their colleagues (Cancio et al., 2018; Moore et al., 2018; Sneyers et al., 2016; Williams & Dikes, 2015). Stressed teachers' can struggle with time management for planning quality instruction, which can

negatively influence student academic achievement (Moore et al., 2018). A teacher with time management difficulty can isolate themselves in the work environment, not socialize with colleagues at work, or choose not to collaborate with other teachers regarding academic instruction, which can lead to an increase in work-related stress (Cancio et al., 2018; Sneyers et al., 2016). These behaviors were found to negatively impact teachers by them losing enthusiasm for the profession, decreased motivation, and no longer finding meaning in their work (Cancio et al., 2018).

Special Education Teacher Work-Related Stress

SETs can experience additional stress compared to their colleagues due to their varying job expectations, which can lead to teacher burnout and problems with SET teacher retention. SETs' work-related responsibilities can be increasingly difficult, demanding, and more stressful compared to general education teacher's expectations, resulting in an increase of stress (Bettini et al., 2017). SET work-related stressors can include increased caseloads, multiple roles to support students with disabilities in the special education and general education settings, pressures for student achievement, and student behavior management (Billingsley 2004; Bettini et al. 2017; Hester et al., 2020; Singh and Billingsley 1996; Wasburn-Moses 2005). SETs who taught in both inclusion and resource settings had an increase of work-related stress (Williams & Dikes, 2015). Lack of administrative support is one of the leading factors influencing SETs' work related stress (Hester et al., 2020). Administrative support can include helping teachers with student behaviors, providing constructive feedback, fair evaluations, and allowing teacher autonomy (Ansley et al., 2019).

Having such a wide range of job roles and responsibilities can lead to an increase in

SETs' work-related stress (Garwood et al., 2017). SETs in particular face challenges regarding

role ambiguity and having to define their own roles as they are learning their positions. For

example, SETs are often expected to teach multiple subjects and multiple grade levels without

adequate resources for determining how this instruction should look (Berry, 2012; Bettini et al.,

2017). SETs have limited time in the work day to provide effective instruction to their students

and complete other responsibilities expected of them while in a variety of settings (Bettini et al.,

2017). Limited time can be attributed to the amount of paperwork that is required of SET.

Paperwork expected of SETs include Individual Education Programs (IEP), Behavior

Intervention Plans (BIP), manifestation determination reviews, annual goals and objectives, and

re-evaluation forms that are perceived negatively by SETs due to limited value due to

redundancy (Mehrenberg, 2013). There has been little research regarding how novice SETs make

sense of the curricular, instructional, and role expectations placed on them or how they foster

relationships and support from mentors, colleagues, and administrators. (Youngs et al., 2011).

Teachers who feel that they are being supported in the classroom environment are more

likely to stay in their current positions. School district administrators can support teachers by

implementing stress management interventions for teachers to learn coping skills that can aim to

alleviate work-related stressors (Ansley et al's, 2016; Kolbe & Tirozzi, 2011). Richardson and

Rothstein's (2008) meta-analysis of thirty six experimental studies, including a total sample size

of 2,847 teachers, found there is a positive relationship between implementation of stress

management interventions and reducing teachers' work-related stress. Cognitive behavioral

interventions for teachers were proven to be most effective for managing stress which can

include interventions such as stress education seminars, goal setting, exercise programs, or

problem-focused coping sessions. These interventions actively allow teachers to learn how to address the factors contributing to their work-related stress by changing their cognitions and emotions to more adaptive ones and by identifying and practicing more functional behavioral responses (Bond & Bunce 2000; Cecil & Forman, 1990; Maddi, 2012; Sharp & Forman, 1985). Problem-focused coping sessions such as relaxation and meditation were proven to be the most utilized stress management intervention by teachers due to its simplicity, but not as effective as cognitive behavior interventions (Richardson & Rothstein, 2008). Relaxation and meditation techniques is a more passive approach that aims to refocus attention away from the source of stress and allow teachers to let go of their stress in their minds and bodies.

Work-related stressors can vary among general education teachers and SETs. General education teacher stress can relate to instructional and organizational aspects of their jobs. SETs can experience the same stress as general education teachers, but with additional special education specific requirements can increase SETs work-related stress. With an increase in stress, teachers are more likely to feel burnt out and want to leave the field. SETs are leaving the field at a much more rapid pace compared to general education teachers.

Transactional Theory of Stress in Relation to Teacher Retention

Teacher retention research in relation to stress is not a new phenomenon. However, there is little research regarding teacher stress through the transactional theory of stress and coping model regarding novice elementary SETs specifically. Newly hired, inexperienced, or inadequately certified teachers are most likely to leave teaching in their first five years of teaching due to work demands and job expectations (Berry, 2012; Billingsley, 2004; Fisher & Royster, 2016; Perryman and Calvert's, 2019). Teachers who consistently view themselves to

have lack of resources and an increase in demands tend to be vulnerable to stress, which can lead to burn out and ultimately issues with teacher retention (McCarthy, 2019). Lazarus and Folkman (1984) categorized teachers who view their demands to be exceeding their resources as demanded teachers, which can be most at risk for teacher stress. If demands of teachers in the school environment were to be lowered, teachers would not be categorized as a demanded teacher, but as a resourced or balanced teacher who appraises their work-demands to be appropriate to their resources. How these components effect teachers is dependent on the teacher themselves and how they feel supported.

Factors Contributing to Teacher Retention Issues

Teachers may be more likely to leave the field of education when they feel they are not emotionally supported in their work environment and experience work-related stress. The rate in which teachers leave the field has steadily increased by eight percent each year since 1989 to 2018 (Moore et al., 2018). Teacher retention in high needs fields such as special education, continues to be a problem in the United States with these teachers leaving the field of education most frequently (Williams & Dikes, 2015, Williams et al., 2022). Many school districts will hire teachers that do not have specialized training in the targeted subject area to fill job openings (Williams, 2015). Factors that can contribute to issues with retaining novice teachers include lack of administrative support, location of the school, and low teacher salary (Fisher & Royster, 2016; Frahm & Cianca, 2021; Moore et al., 2018). Teachers interviewed in Hester's (2020) study described their administrators to be unaware of the job expectations of SETs. Lack of administrative support can be identified as one of the leading factors contributing to SET work-related stress (Hester, 2020).

Research has identified a variety of occupational factors that can contribute to teachers' stress. A factor that can contribute to teacher retention is the location of a school. Rural school districts typically offer lower salaries. Teachers in rural areas can be expected to teach multiple subjects due to lack of human and instructional resources, and difficulty accessing professional development (Lazarev et al., 2017; Nguyen, 2020). Teachers in urban areas may choose to leave teaching as a result of lack of resources, lack of opportunities for mentorship and supportive interactions with peers, as well as, limited support in the area of discipline (Moore et al., 2018).

 It can be increasingly difficult to retain SETs in rural and urban schools. SETS in rural schools typically will leave due to not being able to implement a full range of services for students with disabilities based on the financial allocations of rural schools (Helge, 1981). School administrators in rural areas can lack the expertise and specific training to support SETs resulting in the teachers feeling stressed and wanting to leave the field of education (Frahm & Cianca, 2021; Pendola & Fuller, 2018; Kilmer et al., 2017). In some urban schools, administrators have had to resort to hiring teachers without the proper teaching certification (Rodgers et al., 2014). Teachers are more likely to stay in the field of education when it makes financial sense for them which puts rural and urban schools at a disadvantage compared to suburban schools who can offer higher salaries for teachers (Frahm & Cianca, 2021; Nguyen, 2020).

Schools in suburban areas tend to have increased resources for teachers compared to rural and urban schools (Nguyen, 2020). Some school administrators in rural and urban areas have expressed their concerns about their effective teachers transferring to suburban schools due to lack of resources (Papay et al., 2015).Urban and rural schools are usually situated in cities with a low per capita income, resulting in lower funds for the school's facilities and the amount of

educational resources available to students and teachers (Strizek, Pittsonberger, Riordan, Lyter, & Orlofsky, 2006). Novice teachers who had previous training in suburban schools may have difficulty transitioning their skills to rural and urban contexts, needing more support from colleagues and school administrators, which is typically lacking in rural and urban schools (Siwatu, 2011).

There have been continuous conversations regarding if a teacher's salary is comparable to their job expectations. Some teachers have felt that education is not a valued profession compared to other jobs, resulting in lower salaries, which can lead to teachers pursuing jobs in other industries (Fisher & Royster, 2016; Moore et al., 2018; Rodgers et al., 2014). They have expressed feelings of stress due to receiving a low salary and needing to support themselves and possibly a family financially (Kamrath & Bradford, 2020). Higher salary or pay incentives have been discussed as a way to alleviate the stress of teachers and aid in teacher retention. Teachers have expressed the need for school administrators to advocate for higher teacher salaries or incentives to increase the likelihood of teachers staying in the field of education (Petty et al., 2012; Wheeler & Glennie, 2007).

Strategies to Alleviate Teacher Stress and Support Teacher Retention

Research has identified stronger support from administrators, professional development, and mentoring programs that foster collaboration for new teachers to have a positive effect on teacher retention (Fisher & Royster, 2016; Frahm & Cianca, 2021; Perryman & Calvert, 2019). These key factors are important to retain special education teachers and stop the large level of teachers from leaving the field. A teacher interviewed by Perryman and Calvert (2019) shared

that challenges regarding teacher retention have continued to manifest and increase over the years. A review of the literature regarding the identified strategies will be described below.

Support from Administrators

Administrative support can have the ability to limit teacher turnover (Borman & Dowling, 2008; Frahm & Cianca, 2021; Tran & Dou, 2021). Novice teachers looking to enter the field of education typically evaluate the support provided by school administrators, such as training offered to new teachers and mentoring programs, when determining if they want to be employed at a particular school (Horng, 2009; Robinson, 2012). SETs have expressed reduced stress when school administrators alleviated some of SETs required paperwork, allowing SETs to focus more on the instructional aspects of teaching (Fisher & Royster, 2016; Mehrenberg, 2013). SETs unique job expectations may require school administrators to provide specific and ongoing training to ensure SETs are upholding federal and state mandated special education jobs expectations.

Professional Development

Training for SETs can include professional development which can be presented as lectures, workshops, or scheduled instructional training days throughout the year (Rodgers et al., 2014). Professional development can be considered a basic need for novice teachers, aiming to address teachers' physiological and safety needs in the school environment. Novice teachers benefit from professional development opportunities because it can provide them with the opportunity to engage with other experienced educators to gain support and feedback regarding their experiences in the classroom (Rodgers et al., 2014). SETs have expressed the need for

professional development that is specific to their unique job expectations (Fisher & Royster, 2016). Professional development for SETs also should be continually adapting based on the unique needs of their students and constantly changing legal mandates. Along with professional development, SETs have expressed that having a mentor teacher that engages in professional development with them can help with work-related stress due to the mentor teacher understanding the unique job expectations of SETs (Bowman, 2014).

Mentoring

Mentoring for novice teachers can be viewed as a basic need as a novice teacher. Novice teachers have expressed the need to feel respected in their jobs and connected with their colleagues to reduce work-related stress that can come with being inexperienced (Bowman, 2014; Fisher & Royster, 2016; Stanulis & Floden, 2009). Mentor teachers should be supportive, attentive, non-judgemental, and open to other teaching styles when assisting their mentee teachers (Efron et al., 2012; Johnson, 2002; Marable & Raimondi, 2007; Rowley, 1999; Zachary & Koestenbaum, 2011). The role of a mentor can also include observing and assessing their mentee teachers for the purpose of supporting them (Efron et al., 2012). Support from mentors can alleviate novice teachers' feelings of isolation and aid in building positive relationships among teachers in the school (Rodgers et al., 2014). Mentor and mentee collaboration can include engagement in grade level or content level team meetings, instructional workshops, or lectures provided by other experienced educators. Although mentoring programs have proven to be effective, mentor teachers must allocate specific time to assist their mentee, which can be challenging and can provide stress to the mentor teacher.

Retention has been a continuous problem in the field of special education, especially for novice SETs. The first five years of a teacher's career can be considered some of the most difficult. It can be viewed that a novice teacher has two jobs at the same time, to teach and learn how to teach. Support from school administrators and experienced teachers through mentoring can have a positive impact on teacher stress. Professional development can be a tool to address the unique needs of the teachers in specific areas of teaching, such as special education. With high teacher turnover, teachers who continually stay at a school can feel pressure to maintain a positive school environment and continue to provide high quality instruction for their students. An increase in school funding can be useful to school administrators to implement interventions for teacher stress. Research continues to aim to uncover what causes teachers stress at work and what supports can be implemented to alleviate these stressors.

Purpose of the Study

Based on the review of literature, the researcher chose to examine the impact of work-related stressors on novice elementary SETs' emotional well-being in the school environment. Research has been conducted regarding teacher stress, which can lead to burnout and issues with retention. However, there has been little research regarding teacher work-related stress and emotional well-being relating specifically to SETs. A limited amount of studies were found regarding SET stress relating to retention, but the majority were conducted quantitatively which was an identified limitation. There is a gap in the literature of qualitative studies that allow researchers to share SETs concerns in their own words. The researcher of this study engaged with participants qualitatively allowing the findings to portray the voices of SETs regarding the study's research questions.

Qualitative Research to Explore a Phenomenon

Qualitative research is, "beginning with an assumption and the use of theoretical frameworks to inform study research problems addressing the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem (Creswell and Poth, 2018, pg.42)". Qualitative research is an umbrella term for a variety of techniques that describe, decode, and translate information that pertains to a naturally occuring phenomena in society. It is emergent, flexible, and responds to changes as the study progresses (Merriam & Tisdell, 2017).

Characteristics of a qualitative study include being conducted in a naturalistic setting, the researcher as the key instrument, the use of multiple methods of data collection, participants' multiple perspectives are included in reporting findings, data is context dependent, the researcher is reflective, and findings are reported holistically (Creswell and Poth, 2018; Hatch, 2002; Lapan et al., 2012). The characteristics are further described below:

Table 1.

Characteristics of a Qualitative Study

Characteristic	Literature Based Description
Naturalistic Setting	Qualitative research is done in an environment where the participants experience the problem being explored with informal conversations (Creswell and Poth, 2018).
Researcher is the Key Instrument	The role of a qualitative researcher is being able to be adaptive and immediately responsive during data collection. Qualitative researchers collect data themselves by observing behaviors, examining documents, and interviewing participants. Benefits of the researcher being the key instrument include

	the researcher being able to expand understanding during data collection with verbal and non-verbal communication, be able to process data immediately, clarify or summarize information, check with participants regarding understanding of questions being asked, and explore responses that seem unusual. Data collection is typically not provided in survey form, but collected by the researcher themselves by asking the participants open-ended questions (Creswell and Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2017).
Multiple Methods of Data Collection	Data collection procedures are established based on the research study's paradigm, research questions, contexts, and participants. Qualitative data uses multiple methods for data collection which can include interviews, observations, or other documents that can be reviewed and categorized into themes among all of the data sources (Creswell and Poth, 2018; Hatch, 2002).
Includes Participants' Multiple Perspectives	The goal is to focus on the perspectives of the participants regarding the problem being explored, not the perceptions of the researcher regarding the problem or previous literature. The amount of participants does not directly affect the quality of the study (Creswell and Poth, 2018; Hatch, 2002).
Context Dependent	The researcher is in a situation between specific bounds regarding context or setting. Context will always include the setting in which research will take place, the specific participants, and the activities that are expected of the participants (Creswell and Poth, 2018; Hatch, 2002).
Reflective for the Researcher	Researchers insert themselves in the qualitative research process by expressing their role as the researcher, background information, how it may inform data analysis, and what may be gained from the study (Creswell and Poth, 2018).

Holistic Findings Reporting	Specific findings reporting is dependent on the qualitative research approach that is determined by the researcher. In qualitative research, a complex representation of the problem or issue is represented in multiple facets of data collection and analysis (Creswell and Poth, 2018; Hatch, 2002).

Phenomenological Approach

Phenomenological research relates heavily to the work of mathematician Edmund Husserl and others who have expanded his views such as Heidegger, Sartre, and Merleau-Ponty (Creswell and Poth, 2018; Spiegelberg & Schuhmann, 1984). Husserl's work regarding the phenomenological map is favored in the field of education (Polkinghorne, 1989; Spiegelberg & Schuhmann, 1984). Phenomenological research is an appropriate qualitative method when aiming to understand an experience and uncover findings regarding a lived phenomenon (Creswell and Poth, 2018). This type of research focuses on inquiry of experiences, not descriptions of objects (Polkinghorne, 1989). The features of a phenomenological study include:

- An emphasis on the phenomenon to be explored

- Exploring the phenomenon with an individual or group who have experienced the phenomenon

- A discussion regarding why a phenomenological approach is appropriate for the study

- The researcher identifies their role in the research to establish how personal experiences will not interfere with data collection or analysis

- Data collection typically involves interviewing the intended participants

- Findings are presented based on what the participants have experienced in relation to the phenomenon and how they experienced it (Creswell and Poth, 2018)

These features do not have to be included in all phenomenological research, but are used as a guide for the researcher (Creswell and Poth, 2018). Further description of the steps for phenomenological research are described in Chapter three.

Case Study

Case studies are a type of qualitative work that investigates a phenomenon in specific boundaries (Hatch, 2002). Bounding the case refers to the identification of specific variables to be included such as time frame, exact location for the research, or participants where all other variables would be excluded (Hatch, 2002; Lapan et al., 2012; Merriam & Tisdell, 2017). These specific restrictions allow the researcher to conduct more in-depth data collection and analysis. The bounds of a case study tend to focus on a group of people, setting, or other specific variables that have not been extensively studied before (Lapan et al., 2012). Case study research has been proven to be useful when examining educational innovations, program evaluations, and informing policy (Merriam & Tisdell, 2017). Yin (2014) is a case study methodologist who emphasized case studies to not have a specific formula for implementation. The researcher may learn information early in the study regarding the case that can influence the approach of the study moving forward (Lapan et al., 2012).

The purpose for case studies can be classified as either an intrinsic or instrumental case study. An intrinsic case study's focus is solely on the problem being explored and answering the questions to illuminate data to its participants and possible stakeholders. An instrumental case study's purpose is to use the results to support a theory or develop new knowledge regarding the phenomenon (Lapan et al., 2012). Case studies can be classified as either a single or multiple case study (Hatch, 2002; Lapan et al., 2012; Merriam & Tisdell, 2017). A single case study is

when the researcher examines only one case at a single site and a multiple case study examines multiple cases at a variety of sites (Lapan et al.). Like the phenomenological approach, case study researchers need to bracket themselves keeping personal experiences separate from data analysis (Creswell and Poth, 2018).

Heuristics

Heuristics is a theoretical perspective that was established by Moustakas, initially in the field of psychology (Creswell and Poth, 2018). The purpose of heuristic research is to focus exclusively on the human experience (Moustakas, 2013). The researcher in heuristics is present throughout the entire research process increasing their knowledge of self-awareness and self-knowledge (Moustakas, 2013). Heuristic research is different from traditional cause-effect paradigms because heuristics aim to focus on the discovery of a phenomenon, the first-person interactions with the phenomenon, and illuminating the findings (Douglass and Moustakas, 1985). Qualities that make up heuristic research include recognizing a phenomenon that is not approachable through quantitative measures, focusing on the wholeness of the experience and not just one part, searching for meanings of the experience rather than measurements, obtaining data through first-person interactions, and formulating research questions that are of interest to the researcher. Six phases to heuristic research include the initial engagement of the phenomenon, immersion, incubation, illumination, explication, and creative synthesis (Moustakas, 2013). The six phases can be completed interchangeably depending on the research processes and information unfolded (Moustakas, 2013; Schneider et al., 2015). Each phase is further explained in Chapter three. Moustakas' (2013) phases are depicted below with arrows indicating the interchangeability among the phases:

Figure 2.

Heuristic's Interchangeable Phases
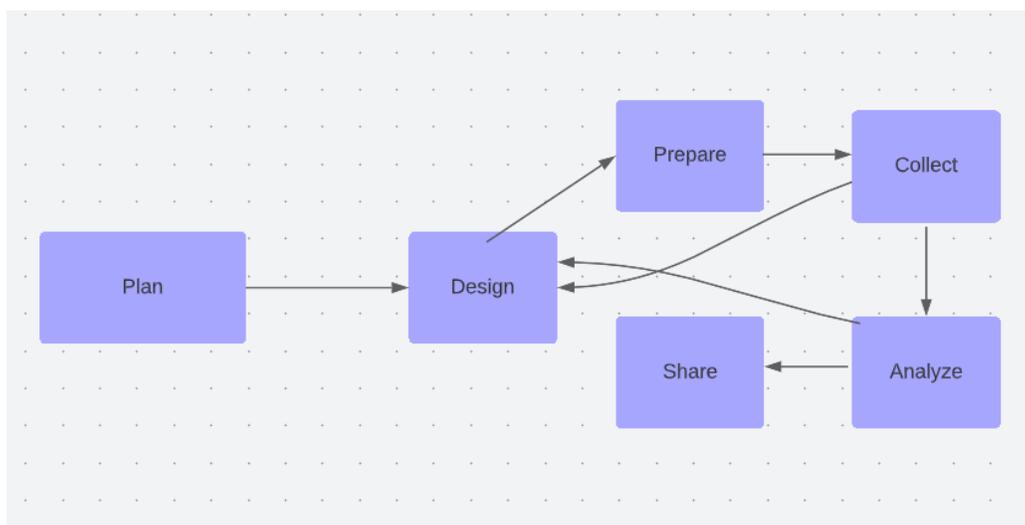
Note. The interchangeable phases of heuristics research determined by Moustakas. From Moustakas, C. (2013). *Phenomenological Research Methods*. SAGE Publications, Inc.

Conclusion

Job expectations of teachers can vary depending on their classroom setting, their students, and grade level they teach. SETs' work-related responsibilities can be viewed to be more stressful compared to general education teacher's expectations, resulting in an increase of SET stress (Bettini et al., 2017). General education teachers' instructional expectations typically are more clear because of the specific curriculums, scheduling, and instructional materials they are required to implement. SETs need to be able to modify teaching materials and complete specific federally and state mandated special education job expectations regarding the unique

demographic of students with disabilities they teach, in addition to many of the job requirements of a general education teacher. There is little research regarding what specific emotions novice SETs experience and how they manage their emotions in the classroom. Novice teachers who feel stressed tend to feel burnout which can lead to wanting to leave the field of education. Factors that can contribute to issues with retaining novice teachers include lack of administrative support, location of the school, and low teacher salary (Fisher & Royster, 2016; Frahm & Cianca, 2021; Moore et al., 2018). Research has identified stronger support from administrators, professional development, and mentoring programs that foster collaboration for new teachers to have a positive effect on teacher retention (Fisher & Royster, 2016; Frahm & Cianca, 2021; Perryman & Calvert, 2019). Based on these findings the following questions emerged for the researcher, (1) How do novice elementary SETs manage their work-related stress in the school environment?; (2) What supports are in place at school for novice elementary SETs to improve their emotional well-being?; and (3) How does work-related stress influence novice elementary SETs' emotional well-being? Due to these questions and a lack of information in a qualitative form showing the teachers' voices, the following research method was selected.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter provides an overview of the methodology used for this study. The problem, research questions, and justification for a qualitative study will be introduced. Additional sections of Chapter three will describe the theoretical perspective and framework for the study, selecting the setting, participants, data collection procedures, data instruments, and confidentiality measures.

Emotional well-being support for Special Education Teachers (SET) has been rarely explored in current research using qualitative inquiry, which could impact how supports and interventions for SETs are approached by educational stakeholders. A qualitative research approach was used in this study because it is useful for sharing the personal voices of the SETs themselves. By illuminating emotional well-being needs for SETs, proactive strategies could be developed and implemented to aid in SET retention. SETs' pre-service programs could teach these strategies to emerging teachers to build a strong foundation for emotional well-being interventions in the field of education. The study was guided by three research questions:

1. What type of situations influence novice elementary SETs' emotional well-being?

2. What supports are offered in the school environment to support novice elementary SETs' emotional-well being?

3. How do novice elementary SETs perceive the school environment in relation to their emotional well-being?

The research questions guided the qualitative methods selected for this study. This chapter provides an overview of the qualitative methods that were used.

Research Design

Qualitative research methods were used for this study because a societal assumption or a problem regarding an individual or groups of individuals will be addressed (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Qualitative data is collected in a natural environment, keeping in mind the individuals who have agreed to participate, and data is not represented using statistical analysis. Qualitative data analysis establishes patterns and themes, while the voices of the participants are represented in the findings (Creswell and Poth, 2018).

The researcher used a phenomenological approach to analyze the lived experiences of an individual or a group's lived phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). The steps to follow when conducting a phenomenological study are listed below:

- Determine the research problem to be examined

- Identify the phenomenon of interest and describe it

- Describe the assumptions of the phenomenon

- Collect data from individuals who have experienced the phenomenon

- Generate themes based on the data collected

- Develop textural descriptions

- Report the findings of the phenomenon based on the data analyzed in written form (Moustakas, 1994)

The first step is to identify a problem to be explored relating to a lived phenomenon of an individual or a group (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). The researcher defined the problem, the assumptions associated with the problem, and then formulated questions based on the assumptions (Moustakas's, 1994). The recommended number of participants for a phenomenological study range anywhere from five to twenty-five, depending on the availability

of possible participants. In a phenomenological approach, group or individual interviews are the

primary source of data collection (Polkinghorne, 1989). Interviewing participants is useful when

the researcher is unable to observe behaviors, feelings, or how the participants interpret their

surroundings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2017; Moustakas, 1994). Based on the data collected from the

interviews, themes were generated from significant statements the participants expressed relating

to the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The researcher used the themes to write a

description of the participants' experiences and present the findings in written form.

Case study research focuses on specific boundaries regarding the phenomenon to be

studied (Hatch, 2002; Yin,2014). A case study is, "an empirical inquiry that investigates a

contemporary phenomenon in its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between the

phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" (Yin, 2014, pg.18). Case study knowledge is

viewed to be concrete and contextual, therefore focusing on a specific group of people sets the

boundaries for the scope of this research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2017).

In this case study, the specific group of participants were novice elementary special

education teachers. There is limited research examining emotional well-being and work-related

stress for this population. Data from the case were analyzed using thematic coding to identify

themes related to teachers' perceptions of their emotional well-being and work-related stress and

the ways in which these perceptions may effect novice teacher retention.

Theoretical Perspective

The theoretical perspective of heuristics guided this study. "Heuristics inquiry is a

process that begins with a question or problem which the researcher seeks to illuminate the

answer" (Moustakas, 2013, pg. 312). The purpose of heuristic research is to ask readers and

researchers to examine a phenomenon relative to their own lives (Lapan et al., 2012; Moustakas, 2013). The goal of a heuristic researcher is to uncover knowledge, not create it (Rodriguez, 1984). In my role as the researcher with a background in special education, I have previous understanding of the variables being explored in this study. Previous understandings can include IEP paperwork, differentiating instruction for students, collaborating with colleagues, etc.

Preparation, incubation, immersion, and creative synthesis are the phases of heuristic research (Moustakas, 2013). These phases are a guide for the researcher, however, all phases do not need to be included in the studies, nor do the phases need to be completed consecutively (Moustakas, 2013; Schneider et al., 2015). Preparation is when the researcher develops a plan, incubation is passively collecting data where no synthesis is occurring, immersion is analyzing the data collected, and creative synthesis occurs when the researcher reports the findings (Moustakas, 2013).

The researcher chose informational interviewing as the primary data collection tool for this study based on heuristic research typically involving an informal conversational approach (Moustakas, 2013; Schneider et al., 2015). Digital reflective journals were used as a secondary data tool to supplement interview data. Incubation took place when the researcher collected both forms of data over a gradual period of time and immersion of data took place during data analysis. Depending on the research question being addressed, data was synthesized in either list or narrative form.

Role of the Researcher

As the researcher, I assumed a variety of roles when conducting this study. I reviewed previous literature regarding the variables explored, coordinated participants, created qualitative

data instruments, communicated with course instructors, gathered and analyzed data, and reported the findings. In heuristic research, the researcher explores a phenomenon which is relative and meaningful to them and their lived experiences (Rodriguez, 1984). Identifying as a novice elementary special education teacher who left the field, I bring my relative life experiences into the interaction with the participants. I also bring a level of empathy for some of the emotions participants experienced, which was beneficial when establishing the researcher and participant working relationship.

My prior knowledge regarding work related expectations of SETs allowed me to ask appropriate supplemental interview questions if a participant had a response which was not clear. I have knowledge regarding what may be a stressor for SETs, but it is also important to note how work related stressors vary among participants. My lived experiences did not interfere with the data collection, data analysis, or with reporting the findings.

Procedures

The Setting

The study took place in the southeast region of the United States, in the state's third largest school district. Regions of the district can be classified as urban, suburban, or rural due to the geographic span. The school district is the county's largest employer with 5,927 employees and about 2,900 classroom teachers. Ten percent of the classroom teachers are either in their first or second year of teaching. The student to teacher ratio in the elementary school classrooms can range anywhere from 21:1 to 25:1, depending on the grade level. There are twenty-seven identified elementary schools in the school district, with twelve of the schools being Title I eligible. Title I addresses the needs of students in high poverty areas and who are at risk for not

meeting challenging state standards (*Title I, part A program* 2018). Teachers at schools whose

population contains high percentages of children from low-income families can experience

increased burnout and work-related stress due to tailoring instruction to meet the unique needs of

students in their class (Boyd et al., 2005; García & Weiss, 2019b; Hanushek et al., 1999;

McCreight, 2000; Sorensen & Ladd, 2020). The daily average of enrollment for elementary

school is approximately 19,800 students.

Selecting the Participants

Based on the bounds of this case study research, participants identified as novice

elementary SETs. Elementary schools and their SETs were identified by the researcher from the

school's website. After receiving Institutional Review Board approval, the researcher emailed the

teacher's district-provided email to recruit participation in the study. The email described the

purpose of the study, criteria for participation, confidentiality procedures, and potential benefits

for the participant. If the teacher met the criteria and was willing to participate, they were

instructed to reply to the researcher via email. Table 2 below identifies the elementary schools in

the target county, the number of special education teachers in each school, how many of those

special education teachers responded to the initial email, and whether the teachers who

responded wanted to participate:

Table 2.
Study Participants

Schools Contacted	# of SETs Contacted at Each School	# Responding	Responses
1. Elk	1	0	0
2. Pine Hill	4	0	0

3. Grapevine	3	0	0
4. Bear Valley	7	2	2 - No
5. Spring Garden	6	5	5 -No
6. Oak Ridge	3	1	1 - No
7. Desert Winds	2	0	0
8. Frozen Lakes	6	0	0
9. Maple Park	3	0	0
10. Sunny Coast	6	2	2 - No
11. Granite Hills	7	1	No
12. Panorama	2	0	0
13. Evergreen	3	2	2 - No
14. Meadow Ridge	5	3	3 - No
15. Silverleaf	5	1	1 - No
16. Faith Elementary	5	2	2 - No
17. Liberty	3	1	1 - No
18. Grandview	1	0	0
19. Einstein	7	1	1 - Yes
20. Deer River	6	2	1 - No 1 - Yes
21. Freedom	8	2	2 - No
22. Crystal River Elementary	6	2	1 - No 1 - Yes
23. Silver Oak	4	2	2 - No
24. Mountain Ridge	6	4	3 - No 1 - Yes
25. Skyline	5	1	1 - No
26. Storm Coast	4	1	1 - Yes

27. Columbus	7	2	2 - No
28. Oak Park	5	4	2 - No 2 -Yes
Total	130	34	

Participants

Seven novice elementary SETs agreed to participate in the study, which fell within the suggested participant limit of ten when conducting a phenomenological study (Polkinghorne, 1989). Teacher participation was dependent on the number of teachers who meet the criteria and agree to engage in the research. The number of teachers who agreed to participate in this study provided a sufficient amount of data to determine the findings regarding the research questions and allowed for data triangulation. The recommended number of participants for a phenomenological study ranges anywhere from five to twenty-five, depending on the availability of possible participants (Moustakas's, 1994). The use of a series of pre-planned interview questions, supplemental questions, and journal entries enabled the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the participant's thoughts or concerns regarding their own well-being.

Participants of this study and any mention of students during interviews were kept strictly confidential through the use of pseudonyms. Prior to the interviews or completion of the journals, participants were reminded to use pseudonyms when referring to a student. Data was collected digitally and stored on a password protected data analysis platform called Dedoose. The researcher was the only individual who had access to the data collected and to the computer that was used. The researcher's computer was locked in a secure space when not in use. Specific participant profiles are provided in Chapter four.

Data Collection Procedures

The following section provides a description of data instruments used in the study, data collection procedures, and methods for data analysis. An explanation of interview questions and journal prompts relating to the research questions are provided.

Means of Collecting Data

Data for this study were obtained from virtual interviews supplemented with digital reflective journal entries. Interviews were informal conversations intended to encourage authentic expression and clarification of the problem being studied (Moustakas, 2013). Due to school district restrictions, data was only collected during January of the 2022/23 academic year.

Participants signed an Informed Consent form and the researcher reviewed the conditions of consent form before each interview. Participants had the right to refuse to participate in the interview process at any time. The first question of the interview asked the participant to identify themselves and their roles in the school.

Virtual interviews were conducted in January 2023, during non-instructional times of the school day for teacher participants. Transcripts of virtual interviews were stored in Dedoose and reviewed using a thematic analysis approach. Interview data was supplemented with data from participants' responses to prompts in their digital reflective journals. Thematic coding was used for all data analysis.

Data for this study was collected during virtual interviews and through digital reflective journaling. Prior to data collection, each participant signed a participation, video, audio, and picture consent form. These consent documents were emailed to the participant for them to review, print, sign, and scan back to the researcher via email. The participants could choose to

not participate in the study at any time. Once consent forms were obtained, the researcher

scheduled virtual interviews with each participant. The data collection window for the digital

reflective journaling was communicated to participants as interviews were scheduled.

Interview questions were generated based on the transactional theory of stress and coping

model relating to perceived work-related stress of teachers and how they cope relating to their

possible stress. The interview protocol was reviewed with the dissertation chair to determine the

appropriateness of the interview questions and whether they are likely to address the research

questions. Feedback from the review was used to develop the final interview protocol used in

this study (Appendix A). The interview questions were tailored to address the overall research

questions of the study, which is detailed below:

Research Question	Interview Questions
What type of situations influence novice elementary SETs' emotional well-being?	1. What are job expectations or duties that you engage in or are required to do during work? 3. Does anything in your job cause you stress? If so, how do you manage these stressors?
What supports are offered in the school environment to support novice elementary SETs' emotional-well being?	4. What supports are available to you at school to address these stressors? (probe after initial answer)
How do novice elementary SETs perceive the school environment in relation to their emotional well-being?	2. How do these job expectations and duties make you feel? 5. How do work-related stressors impact your perceptions of your emotional well-being?

The subsequent survey questions were open-ended and tailored to elicit an informal

conversational approach. The researcher asked teachers to describe their job expectations,

whether they experience stress at work, what work-related stress support they have in school, and their perceptions of emotional well-being in the school environment.

In addition to the virtual interviews, study participants were required to complete digital reflective journal entries for four consecutive weeks. A Google Doc reflective journal template was shared with the participants to provide the researcher with access to the journals in real time. Journal questions were based on the transactional theory of stress model and reviewed with the dissertation chair to determine the appropriateness of the questions and the likelihood of the questions to yield the desired data. The template provided guided prompts relating to the research questions for participants to answer. Feedback from the review was used to develop the template used in this study (Appendix B). Journal questions were tailored to address the overall research questions of the study, detailed below:

Research Question	Interview Questions
What type of situations influence novice elementary SETs' emotional well-being?	
What supports are offered in the school environment to support novice elementary SETs' emotional-well being?	3. How have you managed your work-related stress (if any) this week?
How do novice elementary SETs perceive the school environment in relation to their emotional well-being?	1.How have you been feeling this past week? 2. What work-related stressors have you experienced this week that may have impacted your feelings?

Journal entries were completed each week during participants' non-instructional time. The researcher emailed the participants weekly reminders to complete their journal entries.

In this qualitative study, conducted in a naturalistic setting, the researcher is the key instrument. Multiple methods of data collection were used, participants' perspectives were included, and data is context dependent (Creswell and Poth, 2018; Hatch, 2002; Lapan et al.,

2012). Virtual interviews and digital reflective journaling provided the opportunity for SETs

voices to be included in the findings. Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) transactional theory of stress

and coping model guided the development of the research questions, interview questions, journal

prompts, and presentation of findings. Research findings aligned with Lazarus and Folkman's

(1984) theoretical framework by identifying major themes of stress, coping resources and

responses, and short term and long-term outcomes.

Figure 3.
Re-Imagined Transactional Theory of Stress Model
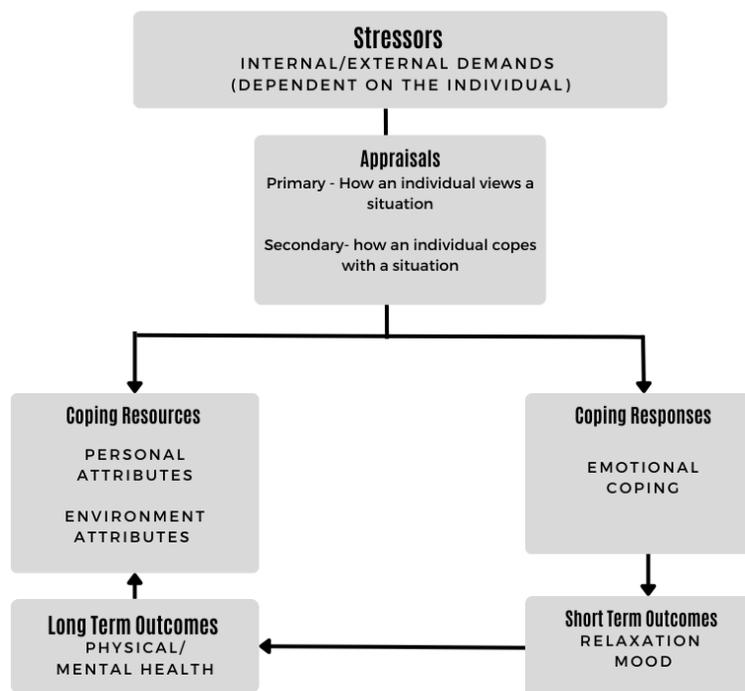
Note. Depiction of the transactional theory of stress and coping model representing different stressors and options for coping mechanisms. From Lazarus and Folkman, S. (1984). Stress, Appraisal, and Coping. New York: Springer.

Assessing the Cultural Context

Participants were informally asked to describe the culture of their school environment. Cultural context helps the reader understand what possibly shaped perceptions of participants' work environments. Cultural context relates how culture may affect behavior by incorporating values, attitudes, beliefs, customs, and ideas shared among groups of people (Saxena, 2021). Participants' descriptions of their school culture are described in the participants profile section of Chapter four.

Data Analysis Procedures

In heuristic research, reporting of the findings must be in simple and descriptive terms for the intended audiences (Moustakas, 2013). Data regarding the types of situations that influence novice elementary SETs' emotional well-being and what supports are offered in the school environment was reported in list form. SETs' expressed perceptions of their school environment in relation to their emotional well-being were thematically coded.

Data was analyzed using the code analysis feature on Dedoose to determine which themes were most frequently present among all of the participants' interviews and reflective journal entries. All data was analyzed as it was received which allowed the researcher to engage in immersion by analyzing one data source at a time. Each interview was recorded, transcribed, and transcriptions uploaded to Dedoose. Each data source was read in its entirety first and then coded based on the themes present in each interview.

Addressing Credibility

Credibility was established by using environmental triangulation methods to determine if codes developed were the same among different data sources and environments in which data was collected. Environmental triangulation addressed the subquestion, Does data collection environment impact themes identified? Participants engaging in multiple types of data collection and cross referencing each supports credibility of theme and code development. For the interviews, the participants were face-to-face with the researcher via a video conferencing platform answering questions in real-time. The digital reflective journals were completed by the participants in a place they felt had adequate privacy and during a non-instructional time convenient for them. Validity of the findings was established if data remained consistent between environments. Credibility was established when research themes and codes were consistent across each of the data collection measures.

Transferability

Transferability was established when the researcher provided clear research questions and a narrow scope, using descriptive methodology. The methodology was reviewed and revised by the researcher and the dissertation committee to ensure transferability. Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) transactional theory of stress and coping model emphasizes that each individual appraises stress differently, which can be transferable among other demographics in research. Transferability relating to this research is further explained in the recommendations for future research section of Chapter five.

Dependability

Dependability was established based on the extensive revisions made by the researcher to achieve clarity of research methods, data collection, data analysis, and reporting of the findings to be replicated in the future. Figures and tables are presented to provide readers with specific information regarding methods used as well as theme and code development for data analysis. A detailed methods section and connecting research findings to previous literature also helped ensure dependability by creating a guide for the researcher when developing research questions and data analysis.

Chapter 4: Findings

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of work-related stressors on novice elementary special education teachers' (SETs') emotional well-being within the school environment. The researcher aimed to uncover what may cause SETs stress at work and emotional well-being supports for SETs. In order to gain the most relevant information regarding novice elementary teachers' perceptions of work-related stress, each of the seven participants were selected because they were SETs within their first five years of teaching in an elementary school setting. This qualitative study was conducted using a phenomenological approach because past research primarily used quantitative research methods, leaving out the voices of participants. Quantitative data yields numerical results, not allowing for SETs lived experiences to play a central role in data collection. The transactional theory of stress is the theoretical framework that guided the development of research questions and how data was analyzed. Heuristics was

implemented because it focuses on a question or problem that the researcher wants to answer that has been a personal challenge for the researcher (Moustakas, 2013).

Research Questions

This study proposed three research questions a) What type of situations influence novice elementary SETs' emotional well-being?, b) What supports are offered in the school environment to support novice elementary SETs' emotional-well being?, and c) How do novice elementary SETs perceive the school environment in relation to their emotional well-being? Each research question was examined through the transactional theory of stress and coping model (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984). The purpose of the transactional theory of stress and coping model was to guide data analysis and development of thematic coding. Themes developed by Lazarus and Folkman (1984) guided the evolution of the research's sub-themes which led to the presence of codes throughout the various data instruments.

Research question 1 explores job expectations SETs experience in the school environment that may influence their emotional well-being. The purpose of this question was to uncover job expectations participants felt may influence their emotional well-being. Participants expressed their experiences regarding the amount of administrative tasks they are required to complete in a limited amount of time, in addition to managing students' behaviors and supervising colleagues in their classrooms. Research question 2 was developed to identify SETs current emotional well-being supports while at school. Some participants identified communicating with their school administrators and families as a support, along with taking time off of work, as well as diet and exercise. Research question 3 was designed to determine SETs perceptions of their emotional well-being related to their job expectations. A variety of emotions

were identified by participants including stress, frustration, feeling overwhelmed, anxiety, and depression.

Organization of the Chapter

This chapter is organized by the three research questions expressed in chapter one which aimed to identify SETs work-related stressors, current supports available to them, and perceptions of their emotions. Data correlates with Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) themes of stress, coping strategies, coping responses, and short term and long term outcomes. Their model was used in development of research themes based on possible work-related stress of SETs and how they cope with stress. Research findings correlating with the transactional theory of stress and coping model allows the researcher to connect current findings to existing knowledge.

Each section in this chapter is organized by themes addressing the overall research questions for the study. Identified SET job expectations were shared experiences among most of the participants as were emotions relating to job expectations. SETs availability of coping resources and responses were similar among participants evident in the data collection measures, relating to the research themes. The reader can expect to understand job demands of SETs and the call for action regarding supports needed to foster a positive emotional well-being. Within each section, participant voices are amplified with either direct quotes or an explanation of their experiences. This section then concludes with a synopsis of findings, leading to interpretations and recommendations of findings in Chapter five.

Participant Profile

Participants of this study are novice elementary SETs teaching in the Southeast region of the United States. Three participants teach at Title I schools. Title I of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESEA) targets schools with children from low-income families to help them meet challenging state academic standards (*Title I,* 1965). Financial assistance is provided to these schools to obtain additional resources such as instructional materials to meet the needs of the students. SETs' caseloads ranged from two to twenty students. Four SETs in the study teach in a self-contained setting with the others teaching in a resource classroom. A resource setting includes students with a disability within a general education classroom for a part of the regular school day, usually assisted by a paraprofessional. A multi-categorical classroom is when there are students with various disabilities within one classroom. Within a self-contained classroom a SET can provide services for students with one type of disability criteria or a mix of disabilities (American Academy of Special Education Professionals*,* 2006). Each participant teaches a variety of subjects during the day which could include English language arts, mathematics, science, social studies, and social skills. Participants teach students identified with learning disabilities, intellectual disabilities, emotional disabilities, or behavioral disorders. Some students that SETs served were general education students with severe behaviors who needed individualized instruction. Participants were able to provide insightful information relating to the research questions. Pseudonyms were used to protect the identity of the participants and chosen to match their personalities. Participants engaged in a virtual interview and reflective journals, yielding necessary data to answer the research questions.

Participants

      Roxanne. Roxanne is a certified special educator and currently teaches students with emotional disabilities, which was different compared to other participants, providing a unique perspective regarding student behaviors. Her vivacious personality and openness provided critical information relating to the research questions. Her personality made the researcher feel comfortable during virtual interview conversation. Thus far in the school year she has taught in a resource setting and a self-contained classroom. With the transition of classroom styles, Roxanne also had to transfer teaching and administrative responsibilities to a new teacher, on top of her own transition to a new classroom. Roxanne feels loving support from colleagues and school administrators. She used terms such as safe and comfortable when being at work each day. Teachers in her school work together and are friendly with one another. Her school was described as laid back when addressing student behaviors, focusing on the "whole child" instead of just looking at behavior.

      Jamie. Jamie teaches in a resource classroom, serving students in kindergarten through second grade. When asked how many students were on her caseload she said about twenty, but she only teaches eight of those students. Some students that she teaches receive instruction using a curriculum that replaces the general education curriculum and other students receive supplemental instruction to general education material. She identified as being the SET within her school that specifically manages students' behaviors whether they are in her class or not. She also expressed other daily duties expected of her such as monitoring the halls before and after school. Jamie's sense of ease during data collection brought a different tone compared to other participants. Jamie says her school's focus is to not leave any child behind. Individuals at her school make sure every child gets everything they can have to succeed.

Fran. Fran has been employed at her school since she has started teaching. She teaches in a self-contained setting with a multi-categorical group of students, teaching every elementary grade level, except kindergarten. She has taught many of her students since she started teaching at the school. Fran described some of the students as making slow and minimal progress over the years and because of that she is creating her own curriculum materials. Fran was able to provide longitudinal insight regarding her students needs and job expectations that she has consistently needed to engage to meet their diverse learning needs. Fran felt she could not group her students together based on ability and has to provide truly individualized instruction for each student. Student supplemental services such as occupational therapy or speech instruction are provided to her students within her classroom. Fran's energy during the virtual interview seemed anxious and as if she needed to get back to her job duties. Fran perceived her school to have low morale due to teachers feeling overworked and not supported by administrators.

Lena. Lena currently teaches in a resource classroom serving kindergarten and second grade students. Students in both grades receive core replacement curriculum instruction and supplemental instruction to the general education curriculum. Lena primarily teaches English Language Arts. There were about fourteen students on her caseload at the point of data collection. She mentioned her additional daily afternoon duties including monitoring students while waiting to go home. She engages in professional learning community (PLC) meetings with her curriculum coaches every week. She is also responsible to attend any other additional instructional training scheduled during the week and after school training at least once a month. Lena's focus is purely on the students' she serves and she will do anything to help them succeed. Although Lena expressed many job expectations, she has a very easy going and bubbly personality. She has an overall optimistic attitude. When asked about the culture of her school

Lena had nothing but positive things to say. The focus of her school aims to promote successful learning of every child through a caring and positive environment. She feels the teachers work to meet the needs of every child and work as a team to accomplish that goal. She described her colleagues as a family.

Susan. Susan teaches in a self-contained classroom and is certified to teach students with moderate or severe disabilities. She consistently has five students in her classroom ranging from pre-kindergarten to fourth grade. Susan has two paraprofessionals who work in her classroom with her everyday. Susan was very reserved and shy. It was as if she did not want to divulge too much information and kept responses short. Susan described the culture of school to be evolving and experiencing change due to turnover with school administrators. She expressed it as being hard to have a team when the school has been through lots of change. The mood of the building was described as mixed emotions and difficult to stay positive. Since data collection ended, Susan said the past month or so has been difficult in her school environment because of the feelings in the building.

Jenna. Jenna, a young and likable novice SET, serves students grades kindergarten through second grade in a classroom setting that she described as half resource and half-self-contained. Jenna creates individualized instructional materials for her students based on what they have learned in the general education classroom. She creates all of her instructional materials and tailors them to her students' academic and behavioral needs. Jenna manages her students' behaviors in her classroom and is also responsible for de-escalating other students' behaviors in other settings. Jenna consistently has one paraprofessional in her classroom which she has provided clear expectations regarding her job responsibilities in supporting Jenna in the

classroom and students outside of the classroom. Jenna described the overall school's culture as safe, inviting, supportive, and nurturing.

Megan. Megan is a certified elementary specific SET who currently teaches fourth and fifth grade students in a resource classroom. She serves five different groups of students, with the largest group consisting of six students.. She does not have any paraprofessional assistance in her classroom so far this year. The maximum number of students she has ever had is fifteen students within one group and the least being two students. On Tuesday and Thursday mornings Megan has hall monitoring duty. Tuesday and Thursday afternoons she is responsible for picking up a group of students in the child development program and walking them to the after school program. She also tutors students after school on Tuesday and Thursday. Even with all of these additional job expectations, Megan was very positive and had the attitude of always being willing to help out. The culture at Megan's school was described as inviting and accepting to all. She feels that she is able to build relationships with students, parents, and surrounding community. When you walk in, she said it feels like home because everyone comes together and works to promote the success of our students.

Setting

Research was conducted in the southeast region of the United States, in a school district that includes urban, suburban, and rural areas, and is the third largest school district in the state. The school district is also the county's largest employer with close to 6,000 employees, of which approximately 3,000 are teachers, and ten percent of the teachers are just beginning their teaching careers. There are 27 elementary schools, twelve of them classified as Title I schools,

collectively serving about 20,000 elementary students. Research participants either taught in a resource or self-contained classroom.

Role of the Researcher

Heuristics research begins with a question or problem which the researcher seeks to uncover the answer. The purpose of this research is to ask researchers to examine a phenomenon relative to their own lives. As the researcher, I identify as being a novice elementary SPED teacher that left the classroom within my first five years of teaching. One of the goals of this research was to amplify the voices of SETs that have been left out of previous research findings. I also felt that my voice as a SET was not heard in regards to the supports I needed in the school setting. In addition to participants' voices, my voice has been incorporated because my experiences and voice are similar to those of my participants.

Themes

Findings revealed themes and sub-themes that aligned with Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) model of transactional theory of stress and coping. Themes included stress, coping resources, coping response, short and long term outcomes. Sub-themes were developed based on situations participants experienced relating to work-related stress, emotions, coping strategies, and supports needed. Codes were identified from words or phrases of the participants relating to the sub-themes. Figure 4 depicts the development of themes and codes relating to research findings.

Figure 4.
Stress Themes and Codes

Research Themes

Theme **Stress**	Theme **Coping Responses**	Theme **Coping Resources**	Theme **Long/Short Term Outcomes**
Sub-Theme **Work-related stress**	Sub-Theme **Emotions**	Sub-Theme **Coping Strategies**	Sub-Theme **Supports Recommended**
Codes Administrative Tasks Lack of Time Supporting Colleagues Student Behaviors	**Codes** Stress Overwhelmed Frustrated Depressed Anxious Exhausted	**Codes** Communication with School Administrators/Family Taking time off Diet/exercise	**Codes** Reduced Workload Behavior Coaching Additional Adult Support Training Fostered Collaboration Physical Heath Support Mental Health Support

Note. Reconfigured organizational framework aligning with the transactional theory of stress and coping model, identifying research themes and code development. From Lazarus, R. S., and Folkman, S. (1984). Stress, Appraisal, and Coping. New York: Springer.

Stress

Lazarus and Folkman (1984) identified the theme of stress as, " the emotional, cognitive, and physiological experience when environmental demands exceed an individual's resources to adapt"(Herman et al., 2020, pg.70). Their theme guided research questions to yield data relating to participants' possible stress while at work, leading to the sub-theme of work-related stress. The sub-theme was developed to analyze data specifically by identifying stressors specific to participants' work. Codes for work-related stress were determined based on the events and job expectations that participants verbally identified to cause them stress. The code for administrative tasks encompassed a variety of job expectations aligning with previous literature.

Administrative tasks can include printing or photocopying resources for lessons, setting up technology equipment, ordering equipment and resources, or keeping and filing records (Blane, 2022). Additional administrative tasks specifically for SETs include paperwork such as IEP development and maintenance (Mehrenberg, 2013). Anytime a participant mentioned lack of time or scheduling restraints it was coded as "lack of time". Many participants explicitly stated that supporting colleagues and student behaviors in the classroom causes them stress at work, leading to the code "student behaviors" and "supporting colleagues".

Coping Resources

Coping resources are the different strategies individuals engage in to help reduce their stress (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984). Strategies can be coping resources that lead to the sub-theme of coping strategies. When coding for coping strategies, the researcher identified common words expressed among all participants related to strategies to reduce stress. For example, anytime a participant stated they talked to an administrator at school to help alleviate stress that was coded as "communication with school administrators". The code specifically identified school administrators because that was the only person participants stated they communicated with while at school. Communicating with family was an identified coping resource for SETs, generating the code "communicating with family". SETs also expressed periods of taking time off of school to help alleviate stress, leading to the code "taking time off". Some participants stated that eating school-provided food and engaging in a form of exercise helped reduce stress, generating the code "diet/exercise".

Coping Responses

A coping response is how an individual appraises a stressor emotionally (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984). Participants' work-related stressors influenced coping response emotions to include stress, feeling overwhelmed, frustrated, depressed, anxious and exhausted. Participants were asked how their job expectations make them feel generating codes relating to emotions. All of the codes associated with the sub-theme of emotions were specifically stated by the participants.

Short and Long Term Outcomes

Lazarsus and Folkman (1984) described short-term outcomes as initial appraisals of stress and long-term outcomes as the lasting effects of appraised stressful situations. Based on work-related stress and emotional well-being data collected, SETs identified the supports they would like to have in the school setting to help reduce their stress. Participants identified the following supports, reduced work-load, behavior coaching, additional adult support, fostered collaboration, and physical and mental health support codes as options to help alleviate stressors in the school environment. This list of supports were derived from participants' direct statements and were coded accordingly.

Findings

Participants consistently expressed negative emotions regarding their work-load and as a result, many discussed leaving the field of education or finding a new line of work. They also expressed their feelings regarding work related stress and their ability to manage negative

emotions and to identify coping strategies. Findings are reimagined in Figure 5 to correlate with Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) transactional theory of stress and coping model. Figure 5 is arranged by work-related stressors identified by SETs, how SETs appraise stressors based on coping resources and responses, and the potential short term and long term of work-related stress. The top of the graphic depicts work-related stressors that participants identified within their jobs. Multiple participants expressed the same stressors throughout data collection. Stressors identified by participants include administrative tasks, lack of time, supporting colleagues, and managing student behaviors. Participants expressed how stressors influenced negative emotions and their appraisal of coping resources. With consistent negative emotions, participants considered leaving the field of education or have been looking for a new job. The figure below illustrates how SET job expectations impact their emotional well-being and lead to burnout and retention issues.

Figure 5.
Themes based on the Framework from Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) Model
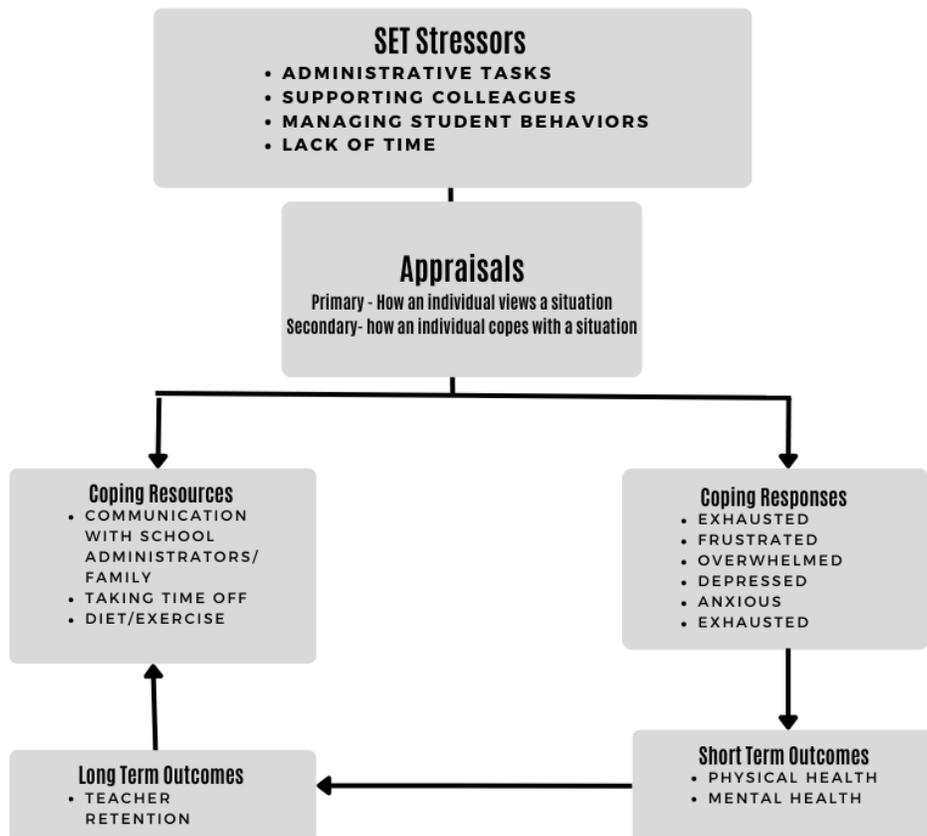
Note. Reimagned depiction of the transactional theory of stress and coping model from Lazarus, R. S., and Folkman, S. (1984). Stress, Appraisal, and Coping. New York: Springer.

Ultimately, job expectations had a negative impact on SETS emotional well-being possibly

leading to burnout and thoughts of leaving the field of education.

SETs Work-Related Stressors in the School Environment

When asked what type of work-stressors participants faced in their jobs, SETs answers were consistent with previous findings of completing administrative tasks or managing student behaviors (Fisher & Royster, 2016; Pressley et al., 2021; Williams & Dikes, 2015). Supporting colleagues in the classroom, special education mandates, and paperwork were identified as stressors unique to SETs (Billingsley 2004; Bettini et al. 2017; Hester et al., 2020; Singh and Billingsley 1996; Wasburn-Moses 2005). SETs identified administrative tasks and lack of time as the most frequent work stressors. The participants emphasized the lack of time they have to complete required administrative tasks and described it as disheartening to be given the same number of hours during the workday as general education teachers, while being expected to complete more tasks within the same amount of time.

Each participant emphasized excessive amounts of special education paperwork, such as Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), progress reports, and behavior plans, to be the most stressful aspects of their jobs. Mehrenberg (2013) also found SETs are expected to complete an excessive amount of paperwork for their special education students. Paperwork required for SETs to complete are mandated by special education law. Supporting colleagues in the special education classroom was also identified as a work-related stressor that is supported by previous literature (Billingsley 2004; Bettini et al. 2017; Hester et al., 2020; Singh and Billingsley 1996; Wasburn-Moses 2005). Some participants had only one paraprofessional in their classroom whereas others had several paraprofessionals. Paraprofessionals helped SETs in their classrooms and assisted special education students in general education classrooms, specials, lunch, or recess. Jenna emphasized that supporting colleagues is a big job expectation that people tend to forget (Jenna, virtual interview). This is a job expectation that was not part of instruction during

my teacher preparatory programs. SETs need to make sure paraprofessionals understand what is expected of them throughout the school day. Having adults in the classroom is an additional supporting responsibility for SETs requiring communication and collaboration.

The time of year that data was collected was unique to this study. Data collection began in January right after winter break, which some participants described as a time of increased stress, resulting in an increased workload. In addition to the usual after break workload, two teachers switched classroom styles in January. This can be a unique scenario specifically for SETs that does not typically happen to general education teachers in the middle of the year. Dockett and Perry (2004) found that general education teachers changing classrooms mid-year can have an impact on children socially and academically. Both Roxanne and Jenna described this switch as challenging and overwhelming (Jenna, journal entry 2; Roxanne, virtual interview). They were expected to train new staff, complete IEPs for students, amend IEPs for new students, and create new materials to supplement the curriculum. Jenna and Roxanne both expressed how this increased additional job expectations on top of all of their other job requirements. They felt overwhelmed by the changes and like they couldn't focus on teaching their students. When teachers feel like they have sufficient time to complete their job expectations, they are more likely to stay in the field of education (Cancio et al., 2018).

In addition to the unique time of the year for data collection, participants were also responsible for completing student progress reports during this time. This was a unique stressor that occurs at specific times throughout each semester. SETs are required to complete progress reports for all of the students on their caseload, resulting in additional paperwork. Mehrenberg (2013) found that SETs complete on average five hours of paperwork a day, in addition to providing high quality instruction to their students. SETs are also required to ensure all other

service providers complete progress reports for students they share. In addition to completing progress report notes, SETs are also responsible for inputting comments on their students report cards as well. Jenna said she continuously has to review progress reports and communicate with her colleagues to get the required reports completed on time (Jenna, journal 3). SETs usually submit progress reports to their school administrators for review before progress reports are sent home with the students. SETs are also responsible for sorting, printing, and distributing progress reports, adding to their administrative tasks.

Participants identified student behaviors to be a work-related stressor. General education teachers also manage student behaviors, but not necessarily to the same extent as SETs. Fran recalled an event time last year which brought her to tears. On this particular day, she had multiple behaviors happening at the same time in her classroom. She expressed how these behaviors were a safety concern for her students, paraprofessionals, and herself. Participants felt there was minimal support and training offered in the school environment to manage student behaviors. When teachers feel supported emotionally, they are more likely to have a positive impact on student academic achievement and behavior (Cancio et al., 2018; Moore et al., 2018; Sneyers et al., 2016; Williams & Dikes, 2015). Participants felt as if administrators do not fully understand the severity of problem behaviors in their classrooms. SETs felt the behavioral solutions that they were provided with added to their already overloaded job expectations.

SETs job responsibilities are unique to their specific area of expertise. There is much more mandated paperwork to be completed in addition to their instructional duties as teachers. SETs are expected to complete these additional tasks in the same amount of time in the day as their peers.

SETs Appraisals of Coping Resources

Appropriate coping resources can help foster teachers' positive emotional well-being (Ansley et al's, 2016; Kolbe & Tirozzi, 2011). SETs may feel that there are few supports available to address work-related stress in the school setting. Some teachers found coping resources or strategies outside of the school environment to address their emotional well-being needs. SETs expressed engagement strategies as helpful for increasing positive emotions.

Communication

Participants were asked what supports are offered in their schools to help foster positive emotional well-being and how they manage stress. Communication with school administrators emerged as the most common theme. Two participants stated that they felt comfortable talking to their school administrators, but typically do not because they recognize that their administrators have many other job responsibilities. This was the only support participants identified as in school supports for positive emotional well-being. This finding is unique to the study because Hester (2020) identified lack of administrative support as a primary work-related stressor. Administrative support can include providing constructive feedback, fair evaluations, or allowing for teacher autonomy (Ansley et al., 2019). SETs may feel like they can communicate with their administrators because they have increased points of contact with them compared to general education teachers. Conversations and opportunities to problem solve with families during IEP meetings can lead to better relationships between administrators and SETs.

Participants spoke positively about their school administrators, using words such as wonderful, phenomenal, and amazing. Each participant expressed being comfortable with communicating with their school administrators about work stressors. Lena expressed that

talking with her school administrators calmed her down when she was feeling anxious (Lena, virtual interview). Jamie also stated she felt comfortable talking to her school administrators about her work-related stress, but usually did not because she did not want to burden them (Jamie, virtual interview). Check-ins with school administrators was a strategy that Roxanne used when feeling stressed or overwhelmed (Roxanne, virtual interview). She described her check-ins as dropping into her assistant principal's office at the end of the day to talk about things that either went well, or did not go well, throughout the day. Researchers identified check-ins as effective for increasing positive emotions for students and they also may be a useful strategy for teachers (Maggin et al., 2015; Swoszowski et al., 2013; Wolfe et al., 2015). Although Jenna also supported these findings, building relationships with her school administrators has been difficult due to administrative turnover (Jenna, virtual interview). School administrators may leave their schools due to conditions in the workplace, work-load, salary levels, increased demand for accountability, ambiguous and developing work-roles, and the impact of the demands of principal work on individual lives and personal responsibilities (Gronn & Rawlings-Sinai, 2003; Zeitoun & Newton, 2002).

Participants also expressed communicating with their families as a way to cope with work-related stress, indicating a level of comfortability as a safe place to vent. Previous research identified coping strategies for teachers within the school environment, but did not mention how families could support teachers outside of school (Fisher & Royster, 2016; Frahm & Cianca, 2021; Perryman & Calvert, 2019). Fran decided that she wanted to spend more time with her family this year to distract herself from the work-stress that has not improved from last year (Fran, virtual interview). Jamie said a way she copes with stress is by sitting on the couch with her husband, watching TV, and not talking about anything work-related. Jamie also has a family

member that is a SET so, when venting to her about work-related stress she feels that this family member is able to empathize with her (Jamie, virtual interview). SETs can benefit by talking to others outside of the school environment regarding work-related stress, especially when they do not believe the support is available at work.

Taking Time Off

Participants' most frequent coping strategy to alleviate work-related stress was taking time off. Susan stated that for the first time in two years, she took a personal day during data collection (Susan, virtual interview). In review of literature, after data collection, taking time off from work was not a coping strategy commonly identified to alleviate stress, illuminating this as a unique finding. Roxanne said she had to take time off from school to take care of her mental health. Her school administrators supported her decision to take time off to address her health and expressed that they did not want her to return until she felt well. Many of the participants said they have been doing a better job taking off days when they are overly stressed. Two reasons participants said they typically do not take off from work is because of the work that goes into preparing for a substitute and the difficulty finding a substitute for a special education class.

Diet and Exercise

Diet was identified as a way to help cope with work-related stress. Diet included foods participants would eat at home or food that was provided to them in the school setting. Megan expressed how she loved when her school's common area had food for the teachers to eat (Megan, virtual interview). Participants identified emotional eating or being shown appreciation with food as a temporary fix for their work-related stress. Lena expressed how emotional eating

helped with her stress, but also caused her additional frustration due to weight gain (Lena, journal 2). Food was also identified as a form of teacher appreciation at school. Participants stated that most of their school administrators will show appreciation by allowing teachers to get a snack during break time. Some participants identified having snacks as bringing them joy, but also providing the potential for developing negative feelings due to an unhealthy diet, and weight gain.

There has been little educational research regarding diet and exercise as a way for teachers, specifically, to cope with work-related stress. Research in the field of exercise science found that when individuals feel stressed they are less likely to engage in physical activities (Kouvonen et al., 2012; Nelson et al., 2008; Sonnentag & Jelden, 2009; Teisala et al., 2014). When stressed, people tend to engage in activities that are less exhausting due to a lack of time and self-regulatory resources. Three participants stated that they exercise daily to alleviate stress. Susan exercises everyday before school starts at seven in the morning to have a positive mindset for the day ahead (Susan, journal 3). Lena and Megan said they take frequent walks to decompress from their work days (Lena, journal entry 3; Megan, virtual interview). Other participants expressed how they take frequent walks throughout the day when they need a break from stressful situations.

SETs Appraisals of Coping Responses

Data collection and analysis revealed a variety of participants' emotions. During virtual interviews, some participants were getting choked up and teary eyed when discussing their work-related stress and how it affects them. Some emotions during data collection were explicitly stated and some were inferred by the researcher based on the visibility of described

emotions. The most common emotion found in both forms of data collection was stress. Participants identified being stressed in their careers.

> "Everything in my job causes me stress because I am a bit of a perfectionist and people pleaser. Those two things about me make my job more stressful. I am constantly backpedaling, moving forward, fixing things, doing this, and doing that" (Roxanne, virtual interview).

Jenna used the phrase "super stressful" multiple times within her journal responses when discussing her job expectations. One event Jenna identified as being super stressful for her was returning from winter break because she had to complete a wide range of administrative tasks that she was not expecting to need to do (Jenna, virtual interview). She stated that the amount of paperwork required not only for IEP progress reports, but report cards was an additional "super stressful" job expectation.

Many participants identified feeling stressed, overwhelmed, and frustrated simultaneously. SETs indicated that feeling overwhelmed was usually associated with the amount of paperwork SETS are expected to complete. For example, Fran said she struggles when communicating with others because she feels that she is complaining all of the time, but she is just frustrated and overwhelmed with her job. In the conversations with participants, the researcher sensed their frustration. Each participant expressed how their stressors have continued even after advocating for support from a variety of administrators. One of the findings unique to this study was how emotions impacted participants' health. Some participants mentioned feelings of depression requiring medication.

When asked what types of support are available in the school setting to address work-related stressors, half of the participants needed examples of what would be considered a support within a school to foster positive emotional well-being. The researcher provided strategies found in previous literature including support from administrators, professional

development, and mentoring programs (Fisher & Royster, 2016; Frahm & Cianca, 2021; Perryman & Calvert, 2019). SETs unique job expectations may require school administrators to provide specific and ongoing training for SETs to stay current in their continuously adapting careers (Fisher & Royster, 2016; Mehrenberg, 2013). Professional development in the school setting could be lectures, workshops, or scheduled instructional training days throughout the year (Rodgers et al., 2014). These professional development opportunities could be targeted at helping SETs complete tasks that are already a part of their responsibilities giving them the time and support to complete those tasks. Mentor and mentee relationships in the school setting can include engagement of grade level or content level team meetings, instructional workshops, or lectures provided by other experienced educators (Rodgers et al., 2014). Hesitation in the responses could be because of not many supports being offered in the school environments or due to not understanding the question and needing to ask for clarity. Jenna initially stated that there was no support for emotional well-being in her school environment, she then went on to add that she is comfortable communicating with her school administrators when stressed (Jenna, virtual interview). Participants were then able to identify communication as an in school support for their emotional well-being.

Although most of the participants expressed negative emotions, there were times of positivity as well. Participants stated they try to keep a positive attitude during the school day especially in front of their students. They emphasized how they will do anything for their students because student-learning comes first. Participants spoke positively about advocating for their students' needs when they felt like their needs were not being considered by instructional decision makers.

Short Term Outcomes: SETs Physical and Mental Health

Data suggest the influence of stress on physical and mental health can manifest in a variety of ways and from a variety of situations or life changes . Stress may be related to an undiagnosed disability or mental health issues, changing careers, pregnancy, or increased workloads. Stress can also appear when too many changes happen at one time such as changing classrooms and teaching students in a different setting, or teaching students with different disabilities. Stress may become unmanageable when adequate resources and supports are not available to provide relief from excessive workplace demands.

> "When I became a teacher my life became unmanageable due to all of the stress. I started going to an outside program which led me to different solutions and psychotropic medications. Finding out that you can't do your job because you're unmedicated with ADHD and can't keep up with things is huge." (Fran, virtual interview)

Roxanne and Fran both identified medication as an intervention which helps them manage job expectations that caused them stress (Roxanne and Fran, virtual interviews)

> "I started a 12 step program which led me to different psychotropic medications. Finding out that you can't do your job because you are unmedicated with ADHD is helpful in finding solutions to manage stress." (Roxanne, virtual interview)

Data also revealed the physical manifestations of stress, from feeling numb, or having a body that tingles during the night, lack of ability to focus, manage time, or complete tasks, and physical exhaustion. Data also highlighted additional physical symptoms of stress that may occur during pregnancy. In a female dominated profession such as teaching, stress and classroom hazards are compounded by typical symptoms of pregnancy.

The teaching profession is one of the leading professions consisting primarily of women (Acker, 2020; Connell et al., 2015; Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011 ; Huppatz et al., 2019; Inandi et al., 2017; Ollilainen, 2019; Ollilainen and Solomon, 2014; Sperandio, 2015; Wyland, 2016). The

relationship between SETs and pregnancy was a unique discussion within this research. A participant provided insight on how pregnancy could be an added work-stressor that is not discussed. The most common physical health symptoms of pregnancy include nausea or vomiting, back pain, headaches, dizziness, and fatigue. Common psychological symptoms include depression, anxiety, and forgetfulness (Foxcroft et al., 2013; Paarlberg et al., 1996; Rodriguez et al., 2001). Rodriguez et al. (2001) found increased stress in pregnancy contributed to prevalence and frequency of pregnancy related physical and psychological symptoms. Increased exhaustion, fatigue, along with managing student behaviors were a concern while pregnant. SETs who are pregnant are often considering the safety of their students, in addition to their own safety and that of their unborn child.

Long Term Outcomes: Teacher Retention

Perceptions of lack of emotional support in the school setting were represented in the data. Participants stressed their need for administrators to understand what supports they need and be consistently involved in their work. According to Fran, over the years, and especially most recently, she feels like administrators have not placed their focus on the needs of students with disabilities, resulting in feeling disappointed when decision makers do not allow time to advocate on behalf of SETs. SETs feel pressure as a result of the high expectations they perceive are coming from local school and district personnel, leading to Lena being told that if you can teach in this school district you can teach anywhere due to the amount of work-load and job expectations she is required to complete (Lena, virtual interview). Because of negative feelings, many participants expressed interest in leaving the field of education which is supported by previous research relating to SETs job expectations and thoughts of wanting to leave the field

due to lack of support, increased demands, and job expectations can lead to feelings of stress and teacher retention issues (Fisher & Royster, 2016; McCarthy, 2019; Ryan et. al.'s, 2017).

Data collected from participants aligned with the transactional theory of stress and coping model. Participants identified their work-related stressors and their perception of a lack of appropriate resources for addressing stress and the effect of stress on emotional well-being. Participants identified unmet needs as a reason for considering leaving education, a sentiment supported in literature (Fisher & Royster, 2016; Moore et al., 2018; Rodgers et al., 2014). High levels of work-related stress attributes to 50% attrition of novice classroom teachers (Algozzine, Wang, & Violette, 2011; Haydon et al., 2018). In this study, 100% of teachers considered leaving the field of education within their first 5 years of teaching.

Conclusion

SETs experience many different work-related stressors that negatively impact their emotions in the school setting. SET voices had not been amplified in previous research to address the needs of emotional well-being support. Few supports to foster teachers' positive emotional well being were identified in the data, thus, many participants described negative emotions as a reason for considering leaving the teaching professions. Research findings can inform school administrators, school districts, and policy makers of emotional well-being supports that can aid in retention of novice elementary SETS. Findings can be used to foster conversations about novice elementary work-stressors and to provide recommendations for emotional well-being support for SETs that foster positive emotional well-being.

Environmental triangulation was utilized to address the subquestion, does the data collection environment impact research themes. This credibility measure aims to identify

environmental factors that may have influenced the information received during the data collection period (Guion et al., 2011). Triangulation is used to avoid potential biases when interpreting data from more than one data source that engages in the same methodology (Heale & Forbes, 2013). There are a variety of different triangulation methods in qualitative research including data triangulation, investigator triangulation, theory triangulation, methodological triangulation, and environmental triangulation (Guion et al., 2011). Codes remained the same among both the virtual interview transcripts and the digital reflective journal data, establishing evidence of validity. Some participants answered questions more thoroughly than others. Themes evident in interview transcripts aligned with those in the journal entries. The ways in which work-related stress impacted participants' physical or mental health were mentioned several times. Participants expressed that they felt supported by their school administrators, while also feeling unsupported over all. During data collection, the researcher asked participants what support they would like to see in their schools to foster positive emotional well-being for SETs. Recommendations which represent the participants' answers will be discussed further in Chapter five.

Chapter 5: Recommendations and Conclusions

Special education teachers (SETs) experience consistent work-related stressors that eventually can lead to burnout and issues with teacher retention. Although previous literature has identified SETs work- related stressors, these stressors are still a problem leading to novice teachers leaving the field within their first five years of teaching (Herman et al., 2017). The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of work-related stressors on novice elementary SETs' emotional well-being in the school environment. When teachers are physically and mentally healthy they are more likely to positively impact student academic achievement, behavior, and positive working relationships with colleagues (Cancio et al., 2018; Moore et al., 2018; Sneyers et al., 2016; Williams & Dikes, 2015). This study, unlike previous research, focuses on exploring specific emotional well-being supports for SETs. Chapter one identified the following research questions that guided data collection and analysis, a) *What type of situations influence novice elementary SETs' emotional well-being?,* b) *What supports are offered in the school environment to support novice elementary SETs' emotional-well being?,* c) *How do novice elementary SETs perceive the school environment in relation to their emotional well-being?* Chapter two provided a review of relevant literature regarding teachers' emotions, teacher job expectations, burnout, teacher retention, and strategies to aid with teacher retention. Chapter three discussed heuristics as the researchers theoretical perspective and situated the study in the transactional theory of stress and coping model by Lazarus and Folkman (1984). Chapter four identified the participants in the study as Roxanne, Jamie, Fran, Lena, Susan, Jenna, and Megan. Research findings were also presented in Chapter four along with a series of themes, sub-themes, and codes relating to the expressed experiences of the participants.

Chapter five will connect current literature related to the work-related stress to the participants' experiences. Recommendations for further research and practice are identified in this chapter An explanation of the author's experience throughout the research process is also included, followed by an overall conclusion for the study.

Comparison to Literature

SETs Work-Related Stress

Administrative tasks. Blane (2022) described general education teacher administrative tasks to include lesson planning, printing or photocopying resources for lessons, setting up technology equipment, ordering equipment and resources, or keeping and filing records (Blane, 2022). SETs need to complete general administrative tasks in addition to special education, legally mandated, responsibilities. For SETs these additional job responsibilities can lead to more work-related stress, when compared to their general education colleagues (Alliant International University, 2020; Bettini et al., 2017; Billingsley, 2004; Fisher & Royster, 2016).

Lack of time. SETs experience a variety of work-related stressors, with some being unique to their specific jobs. Lack of time to complete all of their job expectations was a primary finding for all participants. Fran emphasized that she does not have time to plan lessons to meet their needs or time outside of work to enjoy herself (Fran, virtual interview). Fran has begun to look for other forms of employment due to job stress. Participants emphasized the amount of paperwork that needs to be completed for each student and not enough time to do it. One participant stated she collects data on about 75 different goals for the students within her classroom. Participants provided insight to the excessive amount of special education paperwork they are required to complete on top of instructing their students.This can leave little time for

other aspects of the job. Cancio et al.'s (2018) findings supported SETs needing more time during the work day to complete expected job duties, especially when planning for the diverse group of students they teach.

Supporting colleagues. SETs additional job responsibility of supporting colleagues in their classrooms was a unique work-related stressor for this study. Previous literature identified supporting colleagues as an additional job responsibility, but not a SET work-related stressor (Wiggs et al., 2021). SETs are expected to train and support adults in their classroom, assisting them during instructional times, completing administrative tasks, and supporting special education students in a variety of settings. This unique work-related stressor fits into Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) theme of stress, leading specifically to work-related stress. Although supporting colleagues was identified as a work-related stressor, many participants expressed that having additional adult support in their classrooms would help reduce their stress. SETs indicated they would like additional adult support to help complete administrative tasks and manage student behaviors.

Managing Students' Behavior. SETs stress related to student behavior is a finding supported by previous literature (Billingsley 2004; Bettini et al. 2017; Hester et al., 2020; Singh and Billingsley 1996; Wasburn-Moses 2005). Student behaviors were consistent work-related stress among all participants. All of the participants either spoke about or wrote in their journals about managing student behaviors as a work-related stressor. Megan expressed how difficult it is to manage student behaviors when she has not been specifically trained to do so (Megan, virtual interview). Many participants felt behavior coaching is not available to them at school. Jenna felt she did not receive proper behavior training during their college teacher preparation programs (Jenna, virtual interview). Behavior coaching was a recommendation provided by participants

that they feel would help them. Participants would like there to be a behavior coach at every school that can provide them with strategies to manage students' behaviors as they behaviors are occurring. Lena expressed a need for behavior coach to be stationed at one school, not spread out among a variety (Lena, virtual interview). She emphasized that it is important to have a behavior coach at one particular school to help SETs in the moment of a student needing behavioral interventions.

SETs Emotional Well-Being

Work-related stressors of SETs resulted in negative emotional well-being. Stress was the dominant emotion expressed by participants. They also expressed feeling overwhelmed, frustrated, anxious, and exhausted. Pressley et al.'s (2021) findings suggest that SETs can feel stressed, anxious, or frustrated with their jobs. Overwhelmed was commonly associated with SETs job expectations and lack of time to complete tasks. Frustration was emphasized when talking about lack of available emotional well-being support. Jenna recalled feelings of frustration when advocating for her students (Jenna, virtual interview). She felt decision makers were not considering the needs of each student during instructional decision making. At that time, support from administrators was viewed to be lacking, which can be a work-related stressor for SETs (Hester et al., 2020).

Perceptions of Emotional Well-Being. SETs work related stress led to negative emotional well-being, which impacted their physical or mental health. Emotions can be categorized into negative and positive domains (Csikszentmihalyi & Larson, 1987; Diener, 1999; Erarslan, 2021; Larson et al., 1990; Torquati & Raffaelli, 2004; Watson & Clark, 1988; Watson & Tellegen, 1985). The emotions of anger, frustration, stress, anxiety, and sadness are viewed negatively (Chen, 2016; Hargreaves,1998; Kristjansson, 2016; Sutton & Wheatley, 2003). SETs

role ambiguity and job expectations can be misunderstood by school administrators, negatively affecting SETs' emotional well-being, leading to feelings of stress, frustration, feeling overwhelmed, and depression (Berry, 2012; Bettini et al., 2017; Fisher & Royster, 2016; Pressley et al., 2021; Williams & Dikes, 2015). Emotional well-being supports are primarily in school environments for students. Due to the severity of negative emotional well-being, some participants sought mental health counseling outside of the school environment, resulting in being prescribed medication to help alleviate negative emotions. Some of the participants had such extreme feelings of stress that it impacted their physical health. One participant stated experiencing body shaking and restlessness due to extreme levels of stress. Physical health symptoms of stress was a unique finding for this study. SETs experiencing physical symptoms relating to stress could influence the desire for SETs to take time off from school because of the need for support. Roxanne took time off from school due to stress affecting her both mentally and physically (Roxanne, virtual interview). Research has identified organizational stress management interventions to include structural interventions such as adjusting staffing levels, work schedules, physical environment and psychological interventions including social support and monitored work-load (Michie, 2002). Implementation of stress management interventions could reduce the amount of mental and physical stress an employee encounters.

Emotional Well-Being Supports. Participants identified their only in-school emotional well-being support to be communicating with school administrators. This was unique compared to previous literature stating that teachers were stressed due to lack of administrator support (Hester et al., 2020). Roxanne said she seeks school supports because she is unaware if there are supports readily available to her. She asked the questions, "What would be provided, what would the school do to accommodate teacher stressors?" The only in-school support identified was the opportunity to communicate with school administrators. SETs expressed wanting more supports available to foster positive emotional well-being in the school environment.

SETs recommended supports to alleviate work-related stress. Participant recommendations included behavior coaching, fostered collaboration, physical health support, mental health support, more adults in the classroom, and reduced work-load. These recommendations were different from the strategies reviewed in literature (Fisher & Royster, 2016; Frahm & Cianca, 2021; Perryman & Calvert, 2019). Jenna felt that there is limited support for SETs to help with stress at the moment the events occur. She said, "there are not things you can do to help with stress in the movement" (Jenna, virtual interview). Participants were directly asked what emotional well-being support they would like to have available in their schools. Previous studies did not explicitly ask teachers what they wanted in their schools to foster positive emotional well-being, but rather simply identified what work-related stressors SETs may experience such as increased caseloads, multiple roles to support students with disabilities in the special education and general education settings, pressures for student achievement, and student behavior management (Billingsley 2004; Bettini et al. 2017; Hester et al., 2020; Singh and Billingsley 1996; Wasburn-Moses 2005). Participants' recommendations for in-school supports to foster a positive emotional well-being are further explained in this chapter.

Contributions to the Field

Findings from this research amplifies SETs voices regarding their needs for emotional

well-being support in their schools. School and district administrators should consider SETs

work-related needs to aid in teacher retention. Data supported existing literature stating that

teachers' negative emotional well-being can influence thoughts of leaving the field of education

(Fisher & Royster, 2016; Ryan et al.'s, 2017). Almost all of the participants expressed thoughts

of wanting to leave their current jobs. Some were actively reaching out to friends about their jobs

outside of education and researching new employment opportunities. SETs expressed not feeling

supported or heard when advocating for additional support. Stress can have a negative impact on

SETs physical health and mental health. Fran stated that she is struggling mentally to make it to

the end of the school year (Fran, virtual interview).

SETs experienced unique job expectations causing them work-related stress (Bettini et

al., 2017). Participants' work-related stress was influenced by excessive administrative tasks,

lack of time to complete tasks, managing difficult student behaviors, and supervising colleagues

in the classroom. Roxanne feels that other professionals view general education teachers to have

more difficult jobs (Roxanne, virtual interview). Based on her perspective, she has encountered

individuals who may not fully understand SETjob expectations. Research has found that SETs

can have more stressful jobs compared to their colleagues due to SET role ambiguity and

additional job expectations (Fisher & Royster, 2016; Pressley et al., 202; Williams & Dikes,

2015). School administrators need to clearly define SETs job expectations to be easily referred to

when necessary. Due to SETs' lack of time, before additional tasks are asked of them,

administrators should consult with the SET to determine if it may be an additional work-related

stress. SETs' additional tasks could contribute to the reasons they are leaving the field of education. Jenna encountered conflicting feelings about wanting to be a teacher forever, resulting in her search online for other forms of employment (Jenna, virtual interview). SETs increasing work-load can lead to teacher burnout and issues with teacher retention.

SETs can have overall negative emotional well-being relating to their job expectations. Negative emotions found in data analysis included stress, frustration, feeling overwhelmed, anxiety, depression, and exhaustion. Küçüksüleymanoglu (2011) found that continuous negative emotions can lead to burnout and teacher retention issues. Stress was the most common emotion identified in data collected. Participant stress was connected to feelings of frustration and being overwhelmed when talking about their job expectations. Megan felt overwhelmed from having too many job expectations for one person to handle (Megan, virtual interview). Increased stress caused Jenna to question if she wants to continue being a teacher this year (Jenna, virtual interview). Her questions included, "Should I be doing all this, is it normal to feel stress and is it normal to feel so anxious all the time?" Participants having to find additional time to complete tasks caused them to feel exhausted. School administrators creating specific time in SETs daily schedules for planning can help alleviate the stress of time relating to administrative tasks. Some participants' feelings impacted their mental and physical health. Physical health findings related to SET stress was particular to this research. Based on the identified emotions of participants, it can be concluded that SETs who experience work-related stress can have negative perceptions of their emotional well-being.

SETs expressed a desire for consistent emotional well-being support available to them in the school environment. Participants felt they were not provided with necessary support to foster a positive emotional well-being. Previous literature had not explicitly asked SETs what they want

in terms of support. When asked, participants initially struggled stating what supports are offered to them at school. The only support identified was being able to talk to school administrators about work-related stress, which does not align with previous work, since SETs often have increased points of contact with school administrators compared to general education teachers. SETs have to continually communicate with their administrators regarding special education paperwork, meetings, etc. This provides SETs with increased opportunity for collaboration and increased comfortability.

Participants' responses revealed multiple future recommendations for emotional well-being support. Recommendations included reduced work-load, behavior coaching, additional paraprofessional support, and fostered collaboration as supports that would help with their stress, which are further described as recommendations within the coping resources and responses section of this chapter. SETs can feel overworked and underpaid for the job they are doing. When interviewing participants, they expressed their desire for administrators to be in their special education classrooms for a day to understand their daily work-load.

Recommendations

SETs were asked: What support would you like to see at your schools to help foster a positive emotional well-being? Recommendations are categorized under recommendations for practice and recommendations for research. SETs emphasized the need for administrators in their area to consider the following recommendations. In doing so, administrative personnel (local school and district) aid in retention and lowering the national statistic of 463,200 SETs current job openings (U.S. Dept. of Labor Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2006).

Recommendations for Practice

Physical Health Support. Support for SETs physical health was a unique finding in this research. Researchers in the field of exercise and sports science have found interventions such as yoga and fitness exercise alleviate stress due to their therapeutic effect (Huang et al., 2013; Li, 2012; Kim & Kim, 2007; Pascoe & Bauer, 2015; Phillips et al., 2003). Some participants expressed exercise as a way to alleviate their stress. Susan said she goes to the gym every day before school starts at seven in the morning (Susan, virtual interview). Christina suggested free gym memberships to release SET stress in a healthy way. Some businesses have small gyms in their buildings for employees to use. This may not be feasible for school buildings to incorporate in current structures, but partnering with local gyms could be beneficial. Local gyms could offer discounts for teachers to foster positive physical health. Tong (2020) found that sixty minutes of exercise can have an immediate effect in reducing stress, increasing self-compassion, increasing positive emotions, and decreasing negative emotions. Teachers could try and exercise during times when they are at home. Schools could provide tools such as a walking desk, bounce ball, or small weights to fit in their classrooms as physical health support.

Behavior Coaching. All of the participants manage student behaviors that they felt general education teachers typically do not. SETs called for increased and consistent support primarily relating to students' physical behaviors such as running away, hitting, biting, etc. Jenna felt that she had not received sufficient training during her teacher preparatory programs concerning student behaviors.

> "I think managing student behaviors is one of the biggest job expectations you have to do as a SET that was not talked about in my college classes. I was never exposed to any of these types of physical behaviors until I have to deal with it now" (Jenna, virtual interview).

Christina said she would like more coaching on behavior issues because, as a resource teacher, she was not provided with consistent and explicit student behavior coaching. Some participants mentioned that behavior coaching is something that is typically done for SETs who teach in a classroom supporting students with emotional disabilities.

SETs would like to see more frequent support from behavior coaches as student behaviors occur. Christina described the example of an experience working with a student with difficult behaviors where she was not able to receive behavior coaching until two months after the incident. Having a behavior coach in each school was a support four participants wished to have available to them. Christina and Megan expressed their desire for behavior coaches to be available immediately as behaviors occur to provide behavior intervention suggestions (Christina and Megan, virtual interviews). SETs stated that having a behavior professional in the building could help alleviate SETs' stress. Behavior coaching should be provided to teachers and paraprofessionals so they are able to work together to support students.

Fostered Collaboration. Participants want the opportunity to collaborate more frequently with other teachers in their schools. They also want to collaborate with SETs from other schools who teach in similar classroom settings. Fran described feeling like she is on an island at her school, with little to no support and no place to vent about her struggles. Feelings of isolation may influence negative emotions for SETs. Teachers felt they were not provided adequate time in the school day to collaborate with colleagues. One of the challenges related to fostered collaboration with colleagues is that SETs typically teach a variety of different grade levels. This would mean they would need to collaborate with multiple teachers. With this challenge, SETs just wanted the same opportunity for planning as their colleagues. If SETs do not have time during their contract hours, they are expected to collaborate with others either

before or after school. Administrators can reevaluate SETs schedules allocating time for

collaboration. School administrators should organize times for collaboration inside and outside

of the school environment. SETs who have planning times that align with teachers and students

they share can collaborate during those times. Administrators can schedule and facilitate staff

outings to help with teachers' feelings of isolation in their schools.

Recommendations for Administrative Support

Reduced Workload. SETs want support in their schools to aid in reducing their

work-load. They conveyed there are too many job expectations for SETs and not enough time in

the day to complete them all. During the pandemic, the school district engaged in a schedule

which was four days of students at school and Friday was a planning day for teachers. Fran

expressed how that work schedule was beneficial in reducing their workload.

> "Having a full day to plan lessons and complete IEP paperwork was the best. I was able
> to focus on teaching my students Monday through Thursday and completed
> administrative tasks on Friday. This helped my stress because I didn't have to try and fit
> all of my job duties into an already jam-packed school day or find time outside of my
> contract hours to complete work" (Fran, virtual interview).

SETs also wanted a specific person who can help with writing IEPs. Participants stated that IEP

data collection and writing takes a great deal of time. They stated knowing other teachers in

other school districts who have had trained paraprofessionals help with these tasks. SETs would

still monitor IEP goals and collect data, but the information would then be shared with

paraprofessionals to write IEPs. Jamie, Chisritina, and Mehgan know SETs from other states that

have this support at their schools (Jamie, virtual interview; Christina; virtual interview; Meghan,

journal entry 3). They felt that this resource could help reduce their work-load. District

administrators can collaborate and communicate with administrators in other states that provide

this support to determine feasibility and implementation procedures.

Additional Paraprofessional Support. Participants of this study have adult support in their classrooms, commonly referred to as paraprofessionals. SETs stated the number of paraprofessionals in their classrooms was dependent on the behavioral and diverse learning needs of their students. Participants that may not have adult support in their classrooms stated it was because of the low number of students in their class. School administrators could provide each SET with a paraprofessional in their classrooms because of the diverse needs of their students and additional job requirements that come with that. Roxanne felt that every SET should have paraprofessional support, regardless of how many students a SET has in their class.

> "Across the board I think that every single teacher needs to have adult support in their classroom. If a SET has more than say eight kids, you should have two adult support in your classroom to help with instruction and managing multiple student behaviors that may be happening at one time" (Roxanne, virtual interview).

Susan expressed how much she would appreciate having additional paraprofessionals to help in her class.

> "I would love it if we had more paraprofessionals available to be in our classrooms. My classes are individualized and I try to meet the needs of every kid. Having more paraprofessionals in the classroom could help with administrative tasks, data collection, or creating smaller groups to better meet students' needs" (Susan, virtual interview).

SETs are expected to differentiate instruction based on their students' needs, taking additional time from SETs which was an identified work-related stressor. SETs can delegate administrative tasks that paraprofessionals can complete such as creating differentiated lesson materials to supplement the curriculum. SETs expressed how additional paraprofessionals can help with managing student behaviors. Paraprofessionals can help SETs collect data relating to students' IEP goals. Jenna described how paraprofessionals in her class track student IEP data when she is providing instruction, allowing her to focus on the students. Roxanne stated that this would be very helpful in alleviating stress, but felt that it would not happen because it may have additional

costs (Roxanne, virtual interview). Funding for paraprofessionals was brought up as a potential issue and viewed as a possible reason why there are few available to help SETs.

Mental health support. SETs expressed the need for mental health support in the school environment. They want a third party trained mental health counselor they can talk to. Christina stressed the importance of having somebody other than her colleagues to talk to while at school. Mental health counselors for SETs can help with in-the-moment spurts of stress that could affect the rest of the teachers day.

> "I think that mental health is something that is so important and we need mental health support in our schools so desperately for our staff. We all are exhausted, overworked, underpaid and stressed to the limit. I think that if we had a free mental health counselor in our building where we can go and meet and have someone hear us and give us suggestions or just hear us I think that would be really awesome" (Lena, virtual interview).

Funding was an expressed area of concern when expressing needs for mental health counselors. Most participants felt the above recommendations will not happen due to funding. School districts can re-evaluate funding to better meet the stress needs of teachers. Megan said, "We have a lot of teachers who are socially and emotionally disconnected and I would love to see more emotional support in place for adults in our place of business" (Megan, virtual interview). Some participants stated that they seek counseling outside of the school environment at their own expense. Counselors can help if a teacher needs to step away from an event to decompress. When teachers have negative emotional well-being it negatively impacts their relationships with their students and colleagues, and with quality instruction (Cancio et al., 2018; Moore et al., 2018; Sneyers et al., 2016; Williams & Dikes, 2015).

Recommendations for Future Studies

Future studies should incorporate a larger scope of teachers to include additional perspectives for emotional well-being support in the school environment. Future researchers could make revisions and additions to the interview and journal questions used in this study to gain more specific information in participant responses. Findings from this study suggest ways to expand awareness of novice elementary SETs' perceptions of their emotional well-being and need for support. In addition, these findings suggest action items administrators can consider to help teachers feel supported. Recommendations for future research include the following four items:

Recommendation One. *Implement a study that aligns with the methods of this study, but the scope of the participants include teachers with different identifying characteristics.* Grouping SET participants based on different characteristics such as age, gender, race, or ethnicity could provide more specific data contributing to their work-related stress. Demographic research should aim to uncover:

- How different genders appraise stressful events can influence their emotions related to work. Considering the teaching population primarily is made up of women, including other gender types can illuminate other work-related stressors and perceptions of emotional well-being.
- How SETs age may impact appraisals and feelings of stress while at work. Research has found that younger adults tend to feel more stressed due to comparing themselves to others (*Why do young adults get more stressed?* 2020). Examining how this may specifically affect SETs of different ages in particular could produce unique findings.

Recommendation Two. *Conduct a deeper examination of teacher preparatory programs, course materials, and instructional strategies regarding student behaviors in teachers' future classrooms.* Colleges and universities could develop a team of collaborative stakeholders to discuss behavioral topics to be included in teacher prep programs and explicit hands-on experiences. Participants expressed feeling overwhelmed and frustrated when managing student behaviors because they did not feel prepared during their college classes. Teacher preparatory program research should evaluate:

- Other teacher preparatory programs that have produced teachers who feel confident and competent to manage student behaviors within the classroom. Participants would have to provide an evaluation of the teacher preparatory program they participated in to determine feelings of preparedness. The researchers could then evaluate the program to determine appropriate teaching materials and instructional strategies to implement, specifically tailored to managing student behaviors.

- A case study could be conducted regarding participants who did not feel properly trained after their teacher preparatory programs. Researchers could examine participants' feelings and preparedness pre and post behavioral coaching interventions are implemented.

Recommendation Three. *Engaging in SET classroom observations may provide increasingly compelling data.* Listening to SETs describe their school days and job expectations is one thing, but seeing it can provide insightful contextual factors that can influence data interpretations. Classroom observation research should aim to uncover:

- How do SETs perceive their environments compared to the perceptions of a third party observer. Since SETs are living their experiences, their perceptions of reality may be skewed. A third party individual could provide objective observations, in a naturalistic setting.

- Identifying resources available to the SET in their classrooms can be beneficial in providing increasingly supportive recommendations for teachers and their school administrators. Specific recommendations can stimulate change, which could also be investigated. Some SETs may have emotional well-being supports situated in their schools, but not be aware of them. The researcher doing an evaluation of supports rather than asking the SET can provide more accurate information.

Recommendation Four. *Being able to navigate through the teachers work day could provide the researcher with insight regarding SETs job expectations and stressors.* Not only observing the SET in their classroom, but throughout the school would provide the audience with a more comprehensive picture of the teachers' job expectations as a whole and how that may affect their emotional well-being.

- Researchers could observe SETs throughout their school day in schools that have different cultures. School culture could influence SETs emotional well-being and evaluation of resources available to them.

- Observational research could provide descriptive data and information that clinical research could not provide.

The researcher suggests that school district administrators further investigate resources needed to reduce SETs work-related stress. The overarching focus for future research should address the question: How can administrators effectively implement SETs recommended supports to address emotional-well being needs in the school environment. The answer to that question can lead to increased job satisfaction and overall increased teacher retention

Reflection of the Author's Experience

With heuristics research, the researcher examines a phenomenon that they have lived themselves. I identify as being a novice SET that left the classroom setting due to the amount of work-related stress I experienced. I intentionally did not express my background as a SET because I did not want to skew data. I wanted participants to express their work-related stressors and emotions without feeling like they needed to appease me based on my experiences. It was difficult to withhold empathetic comments because I have experienced what these SETs are going through. As I examined literature regarding SET role ambiguity, I searched for a SET job description and the job descriptions were not the same.

During data collection, it was difficult for me to receive responses from some of the participants. Some participants provided more in-depth detailed information than others. Participation for this study was an added responsibility to SETs already overloaded job expectations. SETs willing to participate emphasized their desire for their voices to be heard regarding SETs emotional well-being in the school environment, their emotions associated with their jobs, and what supports they have or wanted to see in the future.

As I was listening to participants' responses, I reflected on my experiences as a novice elementary SET. It is shocking to me that the very same reasons I left the field are the reasons participants are seeking other employment. I remember, in my first year of teaching, staying at school until 7pm, or until the custodial staff kicked me out. I also did not feel properly trained to manage some students' behaviors. I asked myself the questions, is it because decision makers are unaware of SETs' needs or is it because resources are being allocated elsewhere. With amplifying the voices of the participants, my hopes are for decision makers to consider SETs' needs to foster positive emotional well-being. I personally witnessed too many extensively qualified, kind hearted, and effective educators leave the field of education which is extremely disheartening.

A limitation of this study was the amount of time allotted for data collection. Based on the timeline for research completion and school district restrictions, research had to be conducted during the month of January. Future researchers should consider this possible restriction when planning to conduct research. Alternative methods for teacher recruitment should also be considered. SETs were recruited via their district email which could have influenced the number of participants for this study. Some SETs may check their emails more frequently than others, influencing the number of participants during the data collection period. Participants may have been resistant to email because they felt that their responses may not be kept confidential even with confidentiality measures put into place.

Conclusion

Research regarding novice elementary SETs emotional well-being in the school environment is a topic that has not been frequently addressed. SETs have increased job expectations compared to their colleagues, which could lead to teacher stress (Bettini et al.,

2017; Cancio et al., 2018). The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of work-related stressors on novice elementary special education teachers because they are more likely to leave the field than general education teachers (Billingsley, 2004; Walker et al., 2019). Qualitative research methods were used to provide depth and description to previous quantitative research data. Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) transactional theory of stress and coping model guided the development of research questions, data analysis, and presentation of findings.

SETs can experience similar job expectations to their peers and unique job expectations specifically for SETs (Fisher & Royster, 2016). Work-related stressors identified by participants included administrative tasks, lack of time, managing student behaviors, and supporting colleagues. Participants emphasized the amount of job expectations required of them and the lack of time available to complete them. SETs are required to complete special education mandated paperwork for each of their students. Supporting colleagues was expressed as an identified work-related stressor that SETs feel colleagues tend to forget about. Student behaviors were a stressor all participants felt they have not been trained properly to manage.

Excessive SET job expectations can influence negative perceptions of emotional well-being. Participants identified feeling stressed, frustrated, overwhelmed, exhausted, anxious, and depressed. The number of job responsibilities caused participants to be continually stressed. They expressed feeling overwhelmed by the quantity of tasks required to be completed and frustrated when they did not feel supported. Participants in this study described the impact job related stress had on their physical and mental health. Continuous and increasing work-related stress over the years can lead to teacher burnout and teacher retention issues (Bracket et al., 2010; Küçüksüleymanoglu, 2011; Lee et al., 2016; Talbot & Mercer, 2018). Participants sought to foster positive emotional well-being support inside and outside the school environment.

Participants engaged in coping strategies that included communication, taking time off, diet, and exercise. Participants communicated with school administrators when feeling stressed or anxious due to comfortability, which does not align with previous research (Fisher & Royster, 2016; Frahm & Cianca, 2021; Hester et al., 2020; Moore et al., 2018). Communicating with family was mentioned as a way to vent about work-related stress and family members could empathize with the participant. SETs expressed taking time off from work as a way to cope with stress. Some participants exercised in the morning to prepare themselves for the day and others exercised after work to unwind. Food is sometimes provided to teachers at school that can help them feel appreciated, but was expressed as a temporary fix.

SETs would like additional support in the school setting to help alleviate work-related stress and increase positive emotions. Participants recommended a reduced work-load, behavior coaching, additional paraprofessional support, fostered collaboration, and physical and mental health support. Additional paraprofessional support can help alleviate SETs work-load by completing administrative tasks, assisting with students' behaviors, or creating lesson plan materials. SETs are required to manage physical student behaviors that general education teachers typically do not. Participants felt they have not been properly trained to manage student behaviors and would like a behavior coach to be stationed at each school. Collaboration among teachers and colleagues can help meet the needs of SETs students. Mental health counselors for SETs can be beneficial when a SET needs a break to talk to a third party individual about a situation. Physical health support was described as teachers having access to community gyms at a discounted rate.

Participants of this study stressed the importance of emotional well-being support in the school environment. SETs felt there was limited availability of resources, eventually resulting in

teachers looking for other jobs outside of the school setting. If administrators want to address SET teacher retention issues, they should listen to SETs and provide them with resources they need to feel supported. The researcher suggests future research to investigate how recommendations which represent the voices of SETs can be effectively implemented to address the emotional-well being needs of SETs in the school environment. When teachers feel supported in their classrooms, there will ultimately be a positive effect on teacher retention (Cancio et al., 2018; Moore et al., 2018; Sneyers et al., 2016; Williams & Dikes, 2015).

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Appendix A.

Script/ Interview Questions

Welcome

Hello!

My name is Mallory Laravie, a graduate student at Coastal Carolina University. Thank you for taking the time to join me in discussing aspects of stress and emotional well-being in the field of education. You were invited because you met the participant criteria requirements and have previously agreed to be a participant of this research study.

Overview of the Topic

Our topic is to discuss how work-related stressors may impact one's perceptions of emotional well-being. We will be discussing what supports you already have in place at school to address any emotional well-being needs and how you might manage the identified work related stressors.

Today, with your permission I would like to record the session due to not having an assistant moderator and wanting to be as immersed in the conversation as possible. People tend to say very helpful things in these discussions and I don't want to miss any important information. This session will last approximately one hour. In my report for class, confidentiality of your participation will be upheld by the researcher. When answering questions, please use pseudonyms to uphold the confidentiality of whom you may be referring to (ex. students, teachers, administrators, etc.). The information from this session will be used for learning purposes.

Opening question .

"Before we get into the questions, please state your first name, and your role in the school.

Guided Questions

What are job expectations or duties you engage in or are required to do during work?

How do these job expectations and duties make you feel?

Does anything in your job cause you stress? If so, how do you manage these stressors?

What supports are available to you at school to address these stressors? (probe after initial answer)

How do work-related stressors impact your perceptions of your emotional well-being?

All Things Considered Question:

1. Suppose that there were no barriers, what supports would you like to see in the school setting to help foster positive emotional well-being in the school environment, especially for special education teachers?

Summary Question: (Restate what was discussed and mention any action items) Is this an adequate summary?

Final Question: Is there anything we should have talked about today, but didn't?

Appendix B.

Reflective Journal Prompt Template

Reminder: In my report for class, confidentiality of your participation will be upheld by the researcher. When answering questions, please use pseudonyms to uphold the confidentiality of whom you may be referring to (ex. students, teachers, administrators, etc.). The information from this session will be used for learning purposes.

1. How have you been feeling this past week?

2. What work-related stressors have you experienced this week that may have impacted

    your feelings?

3. How have you managed your work-related stress (if any) this week?